

JEEVADHARA

The Problem of Man

INDIAN THEOLOGY

Editor:

J. C. Manalel

Theology Centre
Kottayam - 686 017
Kerala, India

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Editorial

Today the whole world is in a crisis. It is undergoing, if it has not already undergone, a radical change in every sphere of life and every activity of man. There is no action in any part of the world that has not its reaction in another. Mankind has come of age and, for the first time in history, we are living in one world. One can ignore this new global context only at one's risk. This context in India is an amalgam of traditions represented by different religions such as those of tribals, Sikhs, Parsis, Hindus and by what may be called modernity represented by Marxism and humanism, as well as by a part of the Christian and Hindu intelligentsia.

In such a global context what should be the attitude taken by the Christian theologian? What should be his approach? Three alternatives may be foreseen: First, the Christian theologian may reflect on the new situation of the Church and community and leave it at that. May be, he is afraid of the risk involved in any change of outlook and action and of taking the first step. Secondly, he may reflect on how a two-way interaction can take place between traditional Christian insights and those of an outside religion and community, say, the Hindu. This may give birth to an Indian Christian theology, relevant to the Indian context and incarnate in the Indian way of life and thought. Thirdly, finding himself in the same melting-pot of global change, he may try to articulate a theology which would take into account the insights of the different living traditions that have influenced him and shaped his convictions. In such a case there is the possibility, for example, of a Hindu-Christian theology which takes seriously into account both the Christian and the Hindu traditions. Is such a theology feasible?

Raimundo Panikkar, in his long article, after many years' study and research, is affirmative on this point. Living religions, according to him, are not mere sets of already crystallized formulas and injunctions, but offer direction and sense to the lives of people. Modern secular life brings together people of different

religious traditions. Hinduism and Christianity can no longer live today in self-contained, insulated compartments. Nor can these two religions consider themselves any longer as enemies undermining each other's hold on the Indian people. They are bound to interact, to engage in a dialogue and to come to terms with each other in a deeper way than a mutually tolerating co-existence. Panikkar's study, on his own authority, is a kind of manifesto about the mutual fertilization that fidelity to both traditions is bound to produce. It presents this challenge, and also warns both about the mutual stagnation that would ensue if each religion and/or individual were to retreat into its/his respective old trenches, and about the rupture that could produce a religious schism within the two traditions and even create a third religion. It appeals to the adaptability of both religions which are faced with the destiny of our times, now that the walls of casteism and of exclusiveness can no longer keep asunder what is at least one-fifth of mankind living under the influence of these two religious traditions. It is not a new religion that is required but a new theology. Now, theology is not a mere intellectual exercise, but the conscious interpretation of one's existential path in life towards its fulfilment. This theology is not a mere Christian effort at understanding Hinduism in order to put Christian self-understanding in Hindu garb; nor is it a mere Hindu essay at interpretation and thus at considering Hinduism as an aspect of the Hindu universal quest for the Ultimate. It is rather a theology valid for both traditions and capable of expressing their fundamental insights in a proper language that does not do violence to either. This new theology will pave the way for a healthy growth from both sides, deepening and enlarging the religious horizon of man. In few places of the world could the task of rescuing religion from the grips of provincialisms be better performed than in India, a religious land, a mosaic of religious traditions, and a country where these two religions have co-existed since their beginning. Now is the proper time for a mutual enriching, not only through stimulation and challenge but also through a fertilization of each by the other. Only a positive symbiosis among religious traditions will inspire and guide the pilgrimage of modern man towards his destination. It may very well be hoped that this contribution will trigger a country-wide movement, inviting comments and open discussions from Indian theologians in the subsequent issues of *Jeevadhara*.

John B. Chethimattam, in his article, taking a divergent view, is equally emphatic on the need for an Indian Christian theology (*sic*). In the present Indian context, he says, the creation of such a theology must involve giving the reason for the Christian faith and Christian responses to the anxieties and aspirations of our people and to problems that bedevil society today. Christianity believes that the unique event from which it started was the appearance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God in the flesh. This intervention of God through Christ was not merely the imparting of a doctrine but a reversal of the whole course of human history through Christ's death and resurrection. The scope of Christian theology is to make this new order in Jesus Christ intelligible and rationally acceptable to modern man in different context. Here one shall have to beware of reductionism. In presenting the message in the genuine socio-cultural and religious context of today, one cannot make compromises in the data of faith. True, it is a sad fact that Christians here have not imbibed the true spirit of India. One will have to be faithful to the meaning and implications of Christian faith and also loyal to the authentic life and spirit of India.

Chethimattam has already done the service of indirectly initiating discussion on Panikkar's article. Discussion in depth has to be continued at length and the consequent feed-back will go a long way in the shaping of an Indian theology. This issue of *Jeevadhara*, it is hoped, will mark a formal beginning of implementation of our initial objective as envisaged in the very first issue (p. 7): "One of the concerns of *Jeevadhara* will be to help in evolving an Indian theology, Biblical in its emphasis and ecumenical in its ambit, in the background of the Indian way of life and thought", which we have been trying to realize, though only intermittently, all these years.

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Rtatattva: a Preface to a Hindu-Christian Theology

I. Introduction

For centuries the problem of an Indian Christian theology has occupied Christian theologians in India. And it is natural that it be so. Theology is not done *in vacuo* but has a *Sitz im Leben* of the peoples by and for whom it is being articulated.¹ By and large, however, this theology in India was on a one-way road. It was a reflection of a Christian belief which sought to dress its body of already clearly formulated Christian dogmas in a more indigenous garb. It was more a reformulation of an already crystallized creed than a faith become incarnate in a new historical flesh. By faith I do not mean Christian belief, but rather a sharing in the divine perspective. The ideology behind the so-called dispute of the Chinese Rites is a telling example: not even the use of Chinese words was allowed, but only a 'Christian' superimposition. Although this specific incident was a Roman Catholic one, it clearly demonstrated the generally prevailing Christian attitude. Until 1940 Christian theology was forced to remain inside a qualified internal monologue. No wonder that there was so little creative Asian Christian theology.

Likewise Hindu theologians were hardly cognizant of Christian theology. Hinduism has been little affected by Christianity until recently. The result of the relationship of these two religions in India is a telling example of historical determinisms (colonial powers, economic superiority, language preponderance, etc.) conditioning theological misunderstandings.

1) For a complementary view to the ideas expressed in this article, cf. my paper "Indian Theology: A Theological Mutation", presented at a Seminar held in Pune (October 1978) and to be published in the proceedings of the CBCI Commission for Seminaries: *Theologising in India*.

In spite of its Apostolic origins the Christian Church has remained a tolerated, even sometimes admired, yet indeed an isolated body, in India. In the South a caste-tight mentality kept the intellectuals of both communities separated, and their two peoples satisfied with a more or less peaceful co-existence. The spiritual heads of the Kerala churches as well as later branches of Christianity remained outsiders. Christianity came to the rest of India with the historical conquest and political domination of Europe. Even the sincere efforts of Christian missionaries to disentangle themselves from the colonial powers only served, then, to weaken the Christian impact. A comparison with Islam clearly shows this to be true. Whereas the impact of Islam brought forth a great part of the Hindu medieval *bhakti*, created Sikhism, and produced an entire Indo-Muslim culture, Christianity inspired little more than an important but short-lived Bengal Renaissance. Again, it was a one-way road. Christians were not ready to sustain the dialogue. Both traditions remained without a common language. It is not surprising that the very name of European or Western Hindu theology sounds awkward.

A few decades ago the situation began timidly to take a new turn. This second round, as it were, was neither satisfied with reformulating the pre-existing Christian theology in Hindu terminology, nor even with creating an Indian Christian theology. It began to seek after a genuinely Hindu-Christian theology.

Similarly, the Hindu attitude began changing from one of defensiveness or indifference to one of acknowledgment of the existence and value of Christian ideas and even to fostering the absorption of some of them by cultivating latent seeds of similar insight within the Hindu tradition. Simply recalling R. Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, the Ramakrishna Order and the idea of Democracy will save many pages of elaboration on this. Modern Hindu theology will not call itself Hindu-Christian, but the word 'modern' contains within it enough Christian seeds, even if they do not all bear fruit, to make Modern Hindu theology homologous with Hindu-Christian theology.

Without questioning the needful importance of cultivating in India both an authentic Christian theology and a genuine Hindu theology, I wish to offer some reflections on the nature

and function of a Hindu-Christian theology, i. e., on a valid theology for both Christians and Hindus.²

It needs to be added immediately that India is not only Hindu and Christian. Tribal religiousness, Jainism, Buddhism, Parsism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and other religions are alive in India up to the present day. We should never use the word 'India', for instance, without remembering that it is the third most populous Islamic country in the world. Our reflections should be seen as one approach to a multifaceted situation: that of the encounter, mutual understanding and fertilization of all religious traditions. I maintain that this is one of humanity's most important tasks: to incorporate the variegated experiences of the children of Man into a pluralistic awareness of the human condition.

It needs further to be stated that the manifesto character of the following pages is only meant to open dialogue, to elicit criticism and to trigger a fruitful exchange of views: *theologia a theologizando*. We are still too much at the beginning of the new consciousness to adopt magisterial airs.

The three words of the subtitle are somewhat unsatisfactory, but I cannot find better ones at the moment. Theology, to begin with, is an inappropriate name: *logos* and *theos* have no univocal meanings, nor do they correspond univocally to any Hindu concept. But to say *brāhmavidyā*, *brāhmajijñāsa*, *anvikṣikī*, *dṛṣṭi* or *darśana* might be equally inappropriate. But *dharmavijñāna*, or rather perhaps *dharmatattva* or *dharmavāda* — as discreetly suggested in the title — might be alternatives.

The word 'Hindu' is also imperfect. Hinduism is a bundle of religions and even the word religion is inadequate here. When we say 'Hindu', we point out only a religious-cultural fact that needs to be clarified and concretized. It is also an alien word

2) The problem of a Hindu-Christian theology was already timidly presented by the present writer in the "All-India Study Week": *Indian Culture and the Fulness of Christ* in Madras, from the 6th to the 13th of December, 1956, and has been since then the subject matter of many of his publications.

within 'Hinduism' itself. The word 'Christian' is, in the third place, also improper. Christianity possesses a jungle of theologies, so that Christian theology is an equally ambiguous expression. While there are Christian theologies, some question whether there is *a* Christian theology.

To find a proper title would be one of the first tasks of a 'Hindu-Christian theology'. Perhaps the earlier proviso may suffice for now and spare us the cumbersome device of constantly writing those three words in inverted commas. But the need to speak is larger than the exigency for adequate (and probably not yet existing) names. "The seers fashioned the word by means of their mind!" (RV X, 71, 2). *Ātātattva* could be the word expressing the awareness, the goodness and the establishment (embracing *jñāna*, *bhakti*, *karma*) of the right order of things — as I would like to elaborate in a future study.

II. Its genesis

There is an internal and ineluctable dynamism in the encounter of human traditions. Either they remain mutually ignorant of each other or they come together and open up to a mutuality of influences and eventual fecundation. Cross-cultural hermeneutics begins to make us increasingly aware of this old problem which the Greek historians saw and which has been thematically pursued since Ibn Khaldun's epoch-making study of history.

One of the major causes of Hindu-Christian theology is the seriousness and critical consciousness of nascent contemporary cross-cultural studies.

Until recently cross-cultural studies were generally undertaken with a more or less explicit assumption of the superiority of the host culture, which was most often a Western or Christian one which presumed the overall superiority of its rational method or beliefs. Reason for the West and its own theological paradigms for Christianity were the ultimate basis for comparative and cross-cultural studies. Today we are becoming aware of the gratuitous and unnecessary nature of those assumptions. A new degree of awareness is dawning and I have proposed that the proper method of dealing with cross-cultural interpretations be called *diatopical* hermeneutics.

Whatever the unsolved problems in this new approach, one idea is already almost universally accepted, at least theoretically. No human phenomenon can be properly understood outside its proper context (there is no absolute objectivity). To 'understand' is to stand under the proper context of a text, so that the text becomes intelligible without need for translation. To interpret, on the other hand, is to bridge, at least reflectively, the distance between the text and the context of the interpreter. In other words, the *immediate* context has to be incorporated into the text if this latter is to be properly interpreted. The incorporation of the context into the text for an *ontonomic* intelligibility of the text is what can be called the *intext*. An orthodox Jew nurtured in his tradition since childhood can pray the texts of the Hebrew Psalms. An orthodox Christian has to consciously pray the *intexts* for a meaningful prayer. The *intext* puts you *in*, by incorporating the context that makes the text meaningful to you; but it also puts you *out*, by giving you the conscious distance of your interpretation. In order to reciprocally understand Hindu or Christian texts one needs to include their respective *intexts*. For this a proper hermeneutics is required. This is the locus for an Indian Christian theology and for a Western Hindu theology.

But there is still a new step. In order to bring the two insights together we need an encompassing context (the *texture*) to make them mutually transparent or to effect possible reciprocal influence, and to produce an eventual cross-fertilization. For this our will-power is impotent. We have to stand under the spell of the same myth in order to have the common *texture* which makes possible something like the Hindu-Christian theology. We cannot here manipulate the data. The given has historical and ontological priority.

But instead of proceeding now on this high degree of theoretical abstraction we may examine the two main factors that have made possible the human attitude which lies at the origin of such new studies:

a) the postcolonial mentality and b) the birth and practice of the dialogical dialogue.

a) While the political and historical situation of the world permitted a conquest and dominion of one people by

another, it prevented a serene and unbiased understanding among religions. The phenomenon of cultural dominance is not over yet. The decreasing domination of Hinduism by Christianity is similar to the increasing domination of tribal religions by Hinduism.

When a religious encounter cannot have its *ontonomy* and is hampered by other types of interests, legitimate as they might be, then the religions must either be on the defensive or offensive and must preserve their identity by differentiation, separation, isolation or a cultivated sense of superiority. Even tolerance here is not 'bearing' and assuming the other, but becomes a polite form of indifferentism, as long as the other does not become a threat to you.

The resistance to a Hindu-Christian theology would clearly betray this attitude of a bygone political (although not yet bygone economical and cultural) age: "we have to respect and tolerate each other, but there is no need to interfere in the internal affairs of others". Still some people may feel as if each religion were an absolute sovereign master of its own business, as if there were no common destiny among peoples of this world, as if we could still live in splendid isolation.

Now, the moment that you begin to study another religion for its own sake, and make an effort to understand it with no ulterior motives, you begin to change both your views about that other religion, for by becoming more and more understood it becomes more and more understandable (i. e. acceptable), and your views about your own religion: as a result of being challenged by the active presence of someone else's insights it changes its own self-understanding.

When this mutual communication succeeds on a social scale by eliminating colonial attitudes, when Hindus begin studying Christian values no longer as threats but as opportunities for individual and social growth, when Christians study Hinduism no longer as a false religion incompatible with their own social and religious identity, then a place for mutual learning and dialogue is established, a place from which will come a Hindu-Christian theology. If the Hindu is unafraid of losing 'this

world' by accepting Christian values, if the Christian is unafraid of losing the 'other world' by accepting Hindu values, and both are open to each other without fear, then a historical breakthrough comes on both practical and theoretical fields.

This is not yet the beginning of a Hindu-Christian theology; for it only removes the obstacles to it. It is then that the constructive work of the 'theologian', intellectual, the pandit, or *ācārya* must begin.

b) This is the foundation of authentic dialogue. But it is a difficult one to realize. The dialogue must dismantle not only one's inveterate prejudices about others but one's own deep-rooted preconceptions as well.

It is understandable and legitimate that even when they overcome these extrinsic fears, Christians and Hindus will continue to approach the dialogue with a conviction of the truth and value of their respective positions.

But when the dialogue ceases being a dialectical procedure (*tarka, vaitaṇḍya*) where one proves a point by defeating an adversary and becomes instead a dialogical dialogue (*vākovākya*) in which one seeks to understand the other and oneself better, then the partners become less interested in enriching their own views than in complementing each other's understanding of truth. In other words, if the first phase of the (dialectical) dialogue is to strengthen one's point of view, then the second phase of the (dialogical) dialogue is to enlarge and deepen not only our perspective of ourselves but our perspective of others. This second phase is at the basis of both an Indian Christian theology and a Western Hindu theology (as this latter begins to be developed in many by now well-established Hindu institutions outside India). Learning from others we both understand them better and understand ourselves better.

There is another phase in the dialogical dialogue. It is one in which we let go of anything which is consciously non-negotiable, i. e., all non-debatable issues. Here we have no *a priori*s and we hide nothing from the dialogue. We consciously avoid privilege to any side. Our commitment is not to our starting premises, but to our resulting conclusions.

This attitude does not need to be linked with a sheer individualistic humanism in which we only rely on our private judgments. We may still believe, whatever conclusions are arrived at in the process of dialoguing with another, that our own tradition has better and more solid foundations than particular convictions. But what matters here is the primordial attitude of not wanting to hold to any position that cannot be submitted to the analysis and criticism of another — including even that of the super-individual authority or tradition. This attitude constitutes the initial position for a Hindu-Christian theology. What we are looking for here is not a Christianization of Hinduism or a Hinduization of Christianity, but in so far as it is possible a genuinely valid theology for both Hindu and Christian. When pure dialogue takes over, we cease being just Hindus and Christians defending respective positions, trying to understand the other by deepening our self-knowledge; slowly we begin to unearth our common humanity. We begin to see ourselves as living, loving human beings seeking together the deeper and better Mystery of Reality. This does not mean that we must forego our Hindu or Christian heritage as if taking off some external cloak; we are historical beings and our historical traditions have already entered our nature. But it does mean that we must discover the underlying sources of our humanness and seek out the very springs of our religious allegiances.

Many other and more distant factors could be adduced at the origin of this Theology, but stress has been laid on the two immediate factors. The more highly speculative a theological reflection becomes the more it should be attentive to the historical roots that make such a reflection possible. The just-mentioned factors make us aware of the political and socio-economical co-efficients that play a role in such a theoretical endeavour. It is needless to stress that this is not an exclusive Marxist view and that the word 'colonial' is not synonymous with colonialistic nor 'imperial' with imperialistic for that matter. But it is equally clear that the reflections in this article would have proved unacceptable ten years ago.

III. Its personal character

It should have become clear from the preceding section that the real place for a Hindu-Christian theology is, first of all,

the mind and heart of those who historically, karmatically, find themselves in the two traditions, sharing intuitions, riches and strictures; in a word, the heritage of Hinduism and Christianity. This Hindu-Christian theology cannot be a mere mental exercise but it has to be a *fides quarens ton logon*, a faith in quest of its expression, its word, a personal adventure to elucidate and re-enact the Mystery in which we are personally immersed and to which we are consciously committed. It has to be an existential incarnation, a new taking on of flesh of the *logos*, an integral word. It is not a new *bhāṣya* or commentary but the fruit of a new *anubhava* or experience that emerges among those people who have more than bookish acquaintance with their culture and have discovered in their hearts the insights of their religious ancestors in the two traditions. "That which was best and purest, deeply hidden within their hearts, the rishis revealed by the power of their love" says one rik (RV X, 71, 1) referring to the theandric power of naming.

This theology is a personal concern, which does not mean an individualistic preoccupation; on the contrary, precisely because there is a difference between person and individual. The person is essentially relation. Any authentic personal action coinvolves all those human beings related to the individual concerned. In our case, the personal experience of a Hindu-Christian theology has important repercussions for the contemporary world at large, and not only for those few Christians and/or Hindus more or less interested in or touched by the explicit problem. The peoples of the West can no longer live without having an impact on all levels of the religiousness of the East; and the peoples of the East can no longer ignore nor be secured from the all-pervading influence of the religiousness of the West: and here technology and science also are religious factors.

The Hindu-Christian theology does not come about by the effort of some neutral or almost extra-terrestrial beings examining from a higher stance the credentials of two quarrelling parties, but by the struggle of those Hindus and Christians themselves who strive for an ultimate self-understanding and discover that they are already either contaminated or enhanced, that is transformed, by the two traditions. It is not primarily an inter-theological theoretical affair, but an intra-religious personal one.

This theology does not reflect on abstract possibilities or beautiful dreams. It speaks about ourselves and tries to understand something that the Spirit is inspiring in us, or that our Karma is demanding from us. At stake is our personal salvation, integrity, hope and faith. Short of this pathos everything else is dilettantism. This theology does not solve a puzzle but approaches a mystery. Its concern is not with differentiating and/or reconciling Brahman and God, but with understanding and/or experiencing *aham brahman* and *Theoi este*. This *kairos* is not the caprice of restless theologians nor the subtle discovery of unsatisfied intellectuals; it is an expression of the very fate of our lives; it is reflection of the very destiny of contemporary history. It is the existential situation of the people that demands such a theology.

Because it is a personal affair it requires art as much as science, praxis as much as theory, practical human daily life as much as high spiritual visions, action as much as contemplation. It implies that 'existential incarnation' or 'spiritual experience' on which I have been speaking for the last thirty years.

Unless there is a group of people existentially engaged in such a risky adventure, all the rest is fruitless talk or falls under the anathema of the Kenopaniṣad, the Gītā and Paul against intellectuals, philosophers and the wise people of this earth. To be a thinker, an *ācārya*, a swami, a theologian, a contemplative, a guru, an intellectual, a pandit, is not only an exciting but a dangerous thing full of responsibility and of practical consequences. The salt of the earth. There is no escape. But if the salt becomes insipid, i. e., without strength, courage, insight, it is useless and naive. Hindu-Christian theology is a question of life and death for those called to be the explorers of a new way out of the present predicament, of a new way to an historical and tempiternal Self.

Putting the same idea somewhat more academically, it is an overcoming of both the Scholastic idea of merely objective truths and the post-Cartesian idea of philosophy as a mere rational enterprise. But this overcoming is only a way to regain a higher degree of critical self-awareness in which the vision of truth equally encompasses both the seeker and the sought. It is the attainment of philosophy as that highest possible wisdom in

which the subject is as much involved as the object and the 'super-human' world is not excommunicated from intercourse with humankind. A Hindu-Christian theology is that wisdom, *sophia*, *prajñā* that the Greeks and Indians called *zetoumene* (*epistemē*), *anveṣṭavya*, to be sought out and found.

One condition required for such a search is the conviction that neither tradition is totally self-sufficient when seen over against the more universal background of the contemporary situation; that no person or group of persons can exhaust the universal range of human experience, that no person or persons can ask all the questions and give all the answers.

However, this does not imply that religions must only be seen as partial workmanship, as small pieces in a larger mosaic. Perhaps each religion is a dimension of the other in a *sui generis* co-inherence or co-involvement, in the same way that every human is potentially the whole of mankind, a microcosm of the entire universe. But the fact that each major human tradition contains the seed of the *humanum* does not exclude the fact that each religion, like each individual and culture developed and actualized a finite number of possibilities in a limited way.

To be sure, this is the fruit of the kairological situation in which we find ourselves. Probably what was in the mind and heart of Brahmabandhav Upādhyāya and of many members of the primitive Brahma Samaj has now become a historical fact: an increasing number of peoples are declaring themselves Christian and Hindu at the same time. They are Christians and Hindus dissatisfied with the old answers they give themselves and intrigued by the new insights they hear from others. They are people who neither wish to change their sociological milieu nor their deeper allegiance to their tradition: Hindu and Christian alike they seek to go deeper than artificial syncretisms!

IV. Some theological reflections

The question is not that of using Indian philosophy to express Christian mysteries (as Thomas used Aristotelian philosophy) or to use Western categories to formulate Hindu insights, as is happening so often in present-day Indian universities. It is not a matter of utilizing another instrument that we get some—

where else and applying it to an existing body of doctrines. To put it sociologically: what is required today is neither the Vatican III sought by some Western Theologians nor the mere revival of Hindu orthodoxy sought by some Indian Thinkers. It is not a question of merely opening to the other, while securely resting in our basic positions. Nor is it a question of eclectically and artificially screening 'the best' from both traditions, sweeping up the remaining dust from the floor of history, throwing it out and finding in the residue a syncretistic new system. In a word, it is not just an intellectual problem nor is it just a doctrinal problem nor is it even a pastoral problem. It might not even be an *aggiornamento* problem, unless by '*giorno*' we mean the *haec dies* of the Paschal liturgy and the day that is Prajāpati. For then *aggiornamento* is understood not as a bringing 'uptodate' of some 'everlasting truths', but as Paschal newness, as a new Ushas in the very sense of the Vedas and Easter: a new creation. Furthermore this is not the task of exegetes, even the most creative such as the great *bhāṣyakāras*, Thomas and Ramírez, Sankara and Rāmānuja.

The Fathers of the Church and the great Indian Acaryas of the time of the Buddhist controversies were still too narrowly apologetical in favor of one culture and/or religion. Some of them were close to our case, but by and large, our pluri-cultural and pluri-religious situation is rather peculiar, not because there have not been periods of cultural and religious interminglings, but rather because of the global scale of the phenomenon and the sense of urgency of a world destroying itself if nothing is done. Our case is not on the side of the apologists and defenders of an already formulated or adumbrated orthodoxy. Our concern is not to prove Plato unacceptable or Buddha wrong; we have no ready-made solutions to offer. We find ourselves rather *simul justi et peccatores*, to borrow from the Lutheran controversy, both within the Hindu and the Christian tradition unwilling and unable to reject either. Why should you be either Hindu or Christian if after a mature consideration you do not discover any radical incompatibility?

From the Christian side the level on which this task must be realized is that of Paul and his theology. He was personally involved in two worlds. Paul had a Jewish heart, he was a

Pharisee, a man deep in the riches of his Jewish tradition, a man who lived in the diaspora and thus acquired a perspective only to be gained from the longings of a heart projecting the dreams of a pure Israel into the hard realities of the historical scene. But Paul had a Hellenic mind, a sophisticated education in the culture of his time. If his *mythos* was Jewish, his *logos* was Greek; to a Jewish *hesed* he joined a Greek *noûs*. Paul's theology had a Jewish *materia*: that provided by the life of Jesus as he understood it from the sayings of the disciples. All the data were Jewish; the historical facts, we may say, were raw material for his theology. Nobody can find fault with his utmost fidelity to the data, his personal obedience to the Apostles, his strict conscience in not overlooking a single 'iota' of what had been handed down to him: the Christ tradition. But his *morphé*, his *forma*, was Hellenic, his interpretation no longer belonged to the Jewish tradition. The *en Christō*, the Resurrection, the Transfiguration, the meaning of Christian life, the *Mystical Body*, the Cosmic Christ, the universality of the Message, the role of the Spirit, and so forth and so on, were predominantly Greek. There is no need to accept any thesis about the mystery-religions or to study concrete historical influences, no need to subscribe to particular theories regarding the Apostle of the *gentes* or to make of him a Gnostic. He was not alone and the Judaism of that period was already Hellenized. He was just a man of his time and whatever might have influenced him it had already reached such a deep level of assimilation that mere external 'influences' would not sufficiently explain his thinking. The proof of this is simple: he spoke Greek as his own tongue, proficient as he might have been in Hebrew and Aramaic. Anybody writing and speaking more than one language today will understand. English for example by itself conditions the ways of thinking. Any language has a specific *forma mentis* and there is no way of totally escaping it. There are things which cannot be said in one language as they can in another and things that can only be said in one particular way, while there are things which cannot be said at all — at least until some deeper transformation of language takes place.

But the parallelism with Paul does not stop in the past. It reaches right up to the present. Vatican III is not the

challenge but Jerusalem II is. We are called not to a mere 'up-to-date' but to a *new creation*. And if at Jerusalem I circumcision was superseded, at Jerusalem II, baptism should be ready to undergo a similar scrutiny. Historical Christianity was born with Paul and for two thousand years people have lived with that Christianity. Most of the adjustments up to now have been reforms and modifications of Paul's Christianity. Today we are called upon again to ask fundamental questions. For it is on this radical level that the problem of a Hindu-Christian theology poses itself.

Similarly, the level on which this task has to be realized, is not that of the *darśanas* or the *smṛti* in general, but that of the *śruti* and of the Upaniṣads in a very special way. The Vedas, like Paul, present a similar ambivalence and polarity between an Aryan mind and a Dravidian or proto-Indian heart. The *forma* is Indo-European, but a great part of the *materia* belongs to the previous stratum of Indian culture. The *nāma-rūpa* is Aryan, the language is Sanskrit, but the matter is autochthonous. The Vedas represent also a cross-cultural product resulting from the fecundation of two world-views. To assist at the birth of the Vedic experience will empower us to catch a glimpse of the spark that must be rekindled if a fruitful encounter with another living tradition is to take place.

The Vedic *śruti* and, *mutatis mutandis*, some of the primitive Agamas, offer us a valid example of a Dravido-Aryan theology parallel to that of a Judeo-Hellenic theology. Even in the later Upaniṣadic development (which is unlike many *darśanic* interpretations), there is no denial of the central place of the Sacrifice nor is the *karma mārga* degraded to a second level of activity, as in later tradition. The sacrificial act was still spiritualized and even interiorized up to the point of incorporating a new world-view into the ancient world-praxis.

The question here is not one of merely reviving some ancient *darśana* spurred by a Christian or a Modern catalyst. The question is that which arose before the split between the sharp alternative of *ātmavāda* or *anātmavāda*. This question along with the elements has to be put in the crucible in order to construct a valid theology for contemporary India and the world

at large. What is being called for here is not a Neo-Hinduism but a new Hinduism.

A Hindu-Christian theology is not like a new Scholasticism, which having assimilated some further methods simply offers a revised vision of an old tradition. Our theology paves the way for a novel type of religiousness which should not be a new religion but a new form of the traditional ones. For generations Christians did not call their way of life a new religion. They were Jews and proselytes, converted to Christ, who was a Jew who had clearly stated that he was not abolishing the Law and the Prophets. Yet, circumcision was transformed, since a circumcision of the heart no longer required a circumcision of the flesh to be the symbol of the everlasting pact of Yahweh with his people. Jerusalem I performed a double function of making a break and establishing a continuity. The Hindu-Christian theology works on that level: a baptism of the Spirit may no longer require a baptism of water. The baptism of desire does not mean a desire for 'baptism', but baptism of every authentic desire.

Similarly the Hindu tenet of the *dvija* or twice born may also need to be transformed so as to avoid tying new life exclusively to an ethnic principle, a rigid caste system or a single rite. And we should not take lightly the centrality of the Hindu *varṇas* in spite of their political unpopularity or sociological degradation. There are 60 million untouchables in India!

I am not saying that powerful insights only occurred in the past nor that the Hindu-Christian theology must be based only on a Vedic or Biblical exegesis. But I submit that the theological task must have historical depth and carry with it the weight of tradition.

I am not advocating a lukewarm interpretation of any tradition, a dilution of the incisiveness of any religion, nor even an ecumenism in search of a higher unity. I do not consider it an advantage that modernity has seemingly levelled off traditional convictions. Two examples: The Vedic conception of sacrifice seems almost obsolete in modern Hindu India. The modern Christian liturgy as well has almost completely overlooked its

sacrificial character as a way of emphasizing its societal-building character. On the contrary, my approach is maximalist but it is neither stubborn nor fanatic. Perhaps by being mutually stimulated in their conceptions of sacrifice, the two traditions might discover together a much higher developed model of sacrifice within an altogether new vision of Reality.

Let us consider this further. Paul sincerely and truly called himself an observing Jew, a follower of the Law, yet the Jews did not accept his testimony precisely because they had a different understanding of the limits of Jewishness. For Paul to be a follower of Christ did not imply for him a break with his Jewish tradition. Yet there is something to say in favour of the orthodox Jewish fold: Paul spoke a new language and those who wished only to speak the old, rejected him. "And there will be those of your own household who would look down with suspicion upon you." No wonder there were Greeks who began to understand for the first time what those peculiar Jews were really saying. This very understanding transformed that new Jewish sect into both a new language and a new religion. Christians still speak of the Old Testament, but the New does not seem like a mere continuation when it is seen from the point of view of the Old. Certainly the Jews are not wrong from their own legitimate point of view, nor are the Christians from theirs.

The Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad and especially Gauḍapada's Kārikā can be certainly considered an expression of the quintessence of Hinduism. Yet it could be argued that they no longer defend Brahmanical tenets, but Buddhist insights expressed in a cryptic way. Looking from inside the Hindu tradition one can account for Upaniṣadic refinement and growth, i. e. defend its continuity. Looking from outside the tradition one might say that the delicate Vedic balance between the material and the spiritual worlds, between immanence and transcendence was later solved in favour of the spiritual, the transcendent, the non-temporal and that the Māṇḍūkyakārikā offers another fundamental option and presents another religion, a crypto Buddhism. One could add for the sake of the argument, that Śaṅkarācārya did not just comment on the Sūtras and Upaniṣads, but confronted the Buddhist fundamental metaphysical option and again assimilated it into the

very womb that gave it birth. But whatever details of interpretation there may be, it is a parallel to the Jewish-Christian tension between the two Covenants. It could be argued that Brahmanism and Buddhism are two religions only from a certain point of view and that a certain Hinduism will claim to have re-absorbed Buddhism because it has re-assimilated the Buddhist reformation. This would explain why Buddhism appears as such only when severed from Brahmanism. The problem is complex and we should avoid assertions that are too oversimplified and comparisons that are too strict. Our concern here is only to give a certain historical perspective.

In any case, Hindu-Christian theology is not comparative theology. First of all, because strictly speaking 'comparative theology' is not possible if by this we understand an independent theological comparison of theologies. From which (neutral) theology do we start? And further, to which theology would belong the theological comparison? If only to one of the two compared or to a third one, in both cases comparative theology would have no authority for the theology which is not carrying out the theological comparison. And this is my point: 'comparative theology' has to belong equally to both of the two theologies being compared: it is at the intersection of them; it is a theology that criticises previous theological positions from a point of view accepted by the positions concerned. A Hindu-Christian theology is not a Christian theology alone, exclusively accepting or rejecting Hindu tenets. Nor is it a Hindu theology performing a similar function. Nor can it be a third independent type of theology, a theological reflection on the nature of these two religions from the point of view of say Islamic theology, or pure Reason. A Hindu Christian theology has to be equally Hindu and Christian, a valid theological enterprise for these two. And here lies the difficulty and the challenge of such a task. It can only be done in dialogical dialogue, listening to each other — also within ourselves — discovering ways of understanding and expressing what those theologies are about.

This implies that a Hindu-Christian theology cannot be a systematic and much less a closed theology, a *sarva darśana, a dr̥ṣṭi*. It cannot be a system. But it aspires to a synthesis which brings together what can be brought together and tries to understand both differences and convergences.

It could perhaps be called analogously a metatheology; as there is a Christian theology which allows for a Palamitic, Thomistic, Tillichean theology or a theology common to Advaitins, Trikas, and Vaiśeṣikas, in spite of the major differences of the systems in question.

Or it may be considered an offspring of the two parent theologies. In this sense it would be a new theology *sui stante*. The disturbing question here is whether this theology results in a new religion altogether or in a new awareness that enlightens the two religions. This is why we refer to history in the next section: to opt decidedly for the latter position and reject emphatically the former possibility.

V. The challenge and the lessons of history

To search irresponsibly for a Hindu-Christian theology without being aware of the historical repercussions of such a step, would only prove that either we are not sincere with our Hindu or Christian side or so superficial as not to discover the kind of toy we are playing with.

Since Santayana at least, and probably since Cicero, it is well known that to despise history means that we are prone to the mistakes of our ancestors. A knowledge of history is not a guarantee that we will not perpetrate the same blunders; but at least, by increasing our knowledge and responsibility, the possibility is enhanced that we may be not only more careful in avoiding old mistakes but also more prudent in interpreting and thus coping with the signs of the present times. If the politicians of this world are preparing themselves for a possible nuclear war, should we still be concerned only with the mint and the cumin? If the major issues of the world are hunger, injustice, revolution, war, unhappiness, are we going to spend our energies merely splitting doctrinal hairs of the past?

The proper locus of the Hindu-Christian theology is not that of an artificial query among a few specialized experts; on the contrary, it belongs to an emerging although not yet fully articulated consciousness among the people. It appertains to the proper forum of the world history of our times, although in the small form of a seed that can produce either a new schism as

well as a new sectarian religion, or an extraordinary mutual fecundation of two major traditions of Man. Here we approach the vital function of a valid and creative hermeneutics: to interpret correctly the signs of our times, and to convert these into living and positive symbols.

Who today would seriously affirm that Luther was merely a sick, neurotic monk? But also who today would feel that his legitimate issues justified a total break and separation in Western Christendom? Rather would not most theologians today look for ways of keeping a certain fundamental unity while allowing for autonomies of all kinds? (*Ontonomy* is the word I have suggested to interpret similar cases.) Are we capable today of maintaining polarities without breaking a more fundamental unity? Will Hindu-Christians be excommunicated both from the Hindu and the Christian fold? Or can they transform the Hindu and the Christian self-understandings so that a new consciousness may emerge? An affirmative answer does not mean the melting into one single gigantic religion, but the discovery of a basic unity that allows for religious diversity without absolute incompatibilities and exclusiveness. Again the dream of Ashoka, Liull, Casa, Akbar and many others.

Here not only patience and prudence are needed, but also the role of the intellectual or *ācārya* is paramount. It is not a question of starting a new sect, but of letting a new awareness organically grow. The present day achievements in ecumenism and religious dialogue allow us to hope that we are not speaking about impossible utopias.

Our Hindu Christian theology will certainly create a new understanding of both Hinduism and Christianity. This is unavoidable. Probably the conservatives will consider the new interpretations incompatible with the old ones and may not accept theories of growth and pluralism of religions. Orthodoxies of all kinds can easily cope with evolution, but are without criteria to handle mutations. The burden of proof lies with the promoters of a Hindu Christian theology and the patience and far-sightedness that shall be required of them can be sustained not only because of the grace of God (if we want to speak this language) or the *epektasis* of history, but also because it is a personal and vital concern for them. They will have to resist exasperation,

learn patience and endurance (which does not mean compromise and yielding), and also listen to the provisos, warnings and voices of those who feel threatened by this new awareness.

We should be clear about it. And this is the reason why I alluded to Cicero's *magistra vitae*. A Hindu-Christian theology is bound to create a new understanding. And the danger, I repeat, is whether or not it will be a new religion altogether.

The answer here can be only historical and the assumption is that such an enterprise is creating history. The risk is there. Buddhism became a new religion, at least outside India. Francis-
canism was on the verge of becoming a separated sect. Luther-
anism became a new church. The schisms and heresies through-
out the history of our two religions prove that I am not talking
about mere possibilities. Yet, Hindu *sampradāyas*, Roman Catho-
lic religious orders and Protestant fellowships offer models to
deal with such a problem of diversity without breaking up deeper
layers and loyalties. This calls for careful reflection and a proper
acceptance of the place of myth.

I would like to point optimistically to some differences
from the past. First of all, after the fiascos of so many world
religions and empires we are by now perhaps a little more pre-
pared for pluralism and less enthusiastic for monolithic towers of
Babel. Further, and very important, one of the essential factors
of this theology is that, unlike many other movements, it is
highly aware and critically conscious of this risk and would like
to avoid breaking structures where they need not be broken.
Prudence again emerges as the great virtue. *Viveka*, discernment,
becomes imperative. The historical examples of Sikhism and
Bahai offer warnings to the present.

Another difference worth signalling is the lack of messi-
anism within the modern Hindu tradition and the low-key pro-
phetic character of Indian Christianity. Unlike modern Africa
or Western history which proliferates with prophets and messiahs,
Hindu-Christian theology emerges as a transpersonal movement,
as an intellectual challenge and a spiritual emulation. It does not
arise as a protest, a counter-reform or a revolution. It does not
start with the strong personality of a reformer. It does take birth

in the hearts and minds of ordinary people, thinkers and contemplatives as the radical and inner transformation that comes with a new understanding. The fruits of the encounter should revert to the two traditions as graftings which may produce a new symbiosis without destroying the two plants. Indian spices, like salt, do not want to convert everything into pickle, but just to enhance the flavour and taste of different nourishments.

On the other hand, the mere fear of upsetting *minidoxies*, of *scandalon pusillorum* should not detract us from the *kairos*, the auspicious moment, that we have in front of us. "In the heavenly world there is no fear" says one Upaniṣad. We will spell out further this historical and cultural *muhūrta* or propitious moment.

First, I would mention the increasing weakness of the two separated traditions. Hinduism left alone cannot resist the onslaught of modernity without being mortally or very seriously wounded. Hinduism is undergoing a deep crisis, and unless Hindu consciousness both descends into its own roots and also strikes at the very foundations of modernity the mere juxtaposition will continue to have devastating effects for generations to come. Christianity also is threatened by a crisis. And here much more than in Hinduism, the main cause seem to be internal; the threat of Modernity (to use the same word) is endogenous. There seems to be such unanimity in speaking about the internal transformation of Christianity that many wonder whether this is the same 'old thing' or a post-Christian era.

Secondly, there is a further cause for the crisis in both traditions. I submit that in the present-day state, *vis-à-vis* the global context of our times, they have practically outlived the capacity for inspiration: they have lived out their *āyus*, *aiôn*, life-span; they are exhausting their own resources, running out of 'fuel'. Hinduism and Christianity on the horizon of the one world are increasingly becoming 'tribal religions', perhaps excellent forms to answer the deepest needs, of human beings, but just for those tribes living within that particular forest, be it Indian villages, American skyscrapers, European historical townships or enclaves of transplanted aśrams and institutes. The *dharma* of one tribe may not be convenient to the *dharma* of another. But modern

tribes can no longer be contained by Cyclopean enclosures, Chinese walls, colonial *marcas*, natural rivers or mountains, Maginot lines, ferocious *chaukīdārs* or customs barriers. The mingling is practically unavoidable. India is no longer one self-contained continent. The Christian West is no longer a closed culture. The Veda and the Bible, alone and in isolation, just to take these two important symbols, do not possess the guidelines and the inspiring force to lead man in our contemporary situation. We must understand that merely a new exegesis will not do. What we need is a mutual fecundation of the fundamental ultimate experiences of mankind. This presents serious difficulties not only in itself, but especially for a traditional Hinduism understood as *sanātana dharma* and a traditional Christianity understood as universal religion. It is precisely to meet such difficulties from both sides that a Hindu-Christian theology is called for. I am not saying that we may come straight away with all the required answers. We may, perhaps, agree in the common search, and the very effort to look for ways may put us on the right *mārga*.

A new hermeneutic is called for. I have already mentioned *diatopical hermeneutics*: how do we interpret, i. e. understand and then evaluate human constructs that have elaborated different world-views and forged different tools of intelligibility without major mutual influences? (If you smile at a monkey, it will attack you, because it has not been *told* that you are not showing your menacing teeth, but expressing your sympathy.) We may begin to ponder the possible justification for a Christian interpretation of Hinduism and a Hindu interpretation of Christianity. However a Hindu-Christian theology is not only this. The synthesis has to go deeper; the symbiosis has to be viable.

Thirdly, the temptation of impatience, of throwing away the baby with the bath-water, makes it all the more imperative that the traditions of the world meet together on the ultimate level and try to understand one another and come up with a common language — which I repeat, does not mean a single idiom. If the different human traditions kept in their isolation are worn out and exhausted, this does not mean that they are dead or powerless and that we can ignore the past or deny our own roots. The fact that in isolation none of the existing religions has

culture-building power and enough vitality to construct the new civilization mankind needs (our second observation) does not contradict this third point that they still have a great command over the individual reactions of peoples. The archetypes are very much alive and although the relative number of Hindus and Christians has decreased in the world context, they are still two important factors in the building of a new world order. We cannot bypass them. A Hindu-Christian theology becomes again a historical imperative.

Fourthly, the anthropological precipitate of a sociological solution may convince us of the *muhūrta* alluded to. The sociological solution is the increasing mixture of East and West spirituality today: Christian monks taking up Yoga (and Zen), Hindu swamis taking up science (and technology), young Westerners swallowing the most precarious and superficial Hindu beliefs, young Easterners swallowing the most uncertain and ephemeral scientific theories, etc. The anthropological precipitate is revealed not by the metaphysical observation of the innate human need for exogenous doctrines and ideas, but by the uncritical and naive way in which the foreign elements are absorbed. Post-Christians who have rejected the traditional Heaven and Hell believe blindly in equally literal Tibetan Heavens and Hells. Neo-Hindus who have rejected caste and the sacredness of the cow, believe blindly in class (status) and the sacredness of the machine, etc. All this does not demonstrate the metaphysical need to believe, but the anthropological need to transcend traditional boundaries and the vacuum created when a particular religion has ceased to challenge and inspire the lives of the peoples properly.

Fifthly, the very idea of religion as an institution governing the ultimate destiny of its members finds itself on the wane in our time of crisis, dialogue and disorientation. The danger of extreme totalitarisms on all levels is well known. On the other hand, one extreme does not justify the other. I am not proposing the model of the Shinto-Buddhist or Taoist-Confucian-Buddhist flexibility in Japan and China for a Hindu-Christian theology, although much could be learned from such attitudes. I am proposing that religion as institution does not mean a monolithic administrative and doctrinal organisation but a living

organism with pluriformity of members and functions and positive symbioses with similar organisms. In other words, a Hindu-Christian theology does not represent a threat to either religion. On the contrary, it offers them a challenge for a radical renewal and purification.

VI. The credal problem

If we proclaim the need for a Hindu-Christian theology and not for a new religion we shall have to substantiate the *ontology* of that theology within the deep structures of the two religions. Now, theology, we have said, is the holistic human effort at understanding, expressing and especially realizing our faith. It is, I maintain, the passage from faith to belief, and from belief to action. We should show, therefore, that this theology is an effort at understanding, expressing and realizing the faith of a good number of people, both Hindus and Christians.

A fundamental assumption of this paper is that faith is a constitutive human dimension: that there is no man without this existential openness (to an ever more, which many traditions call transcendence) that constitutes the nature of faith. But the concomitant assumption is that man, as the intellectual being that he is, needs to express the act of faith, by which he responds to the challenge of faith, in and with an intellectual awareness, and, in so far as possible, with a rational articulation. This is the sphere of belief, the credal problem.

For the sake of clarity let us make the following distinctions:

Religion is the way leading Man from his present predicament to what he believes is his ultimate destiny: a path to salvation or liberation. This path is made by the set of symbols, actions and ideas purported to save or liberate man. Generally, a religion crystallizes in a religious tradition, *paramparā*.

Faith is the existential openness of man as one of his constitutive dimensions. Every man is unfinished, not finite, and capable of being fulfilled – of growth, salvation, liberation. Faith is this 'infinite' capacity.

The act of faith is the fundamental human act *par excell-*

ence, by which man responds to the call of transcendence or fills up the gap of his openness. It is this act that saves, liberates man.

Creed is the overall intellectual awareness of Man regarding his faith and the way in which he sees himself performing the act of faith.

Beliefs are the articulations of the creed in intellectual statements.

Dogmas are the fundamental beliefs as handed down by tradition, sanctioned by authority and forming a coherent whole of doctrine: orthodoxy.

Theology is the human activity within a tradition that tries to elaborate a coherent expression of Man's faith as manifested in a system of beliefs and that sums it up in a creed. It is the intellectual aspect of religion.

We should not minimize the importance of religious creeds, their necessity and their essential relationship with religion. A Hindu-Christian theology does not directly propose a brand-new creed, but deepens and enlarges the respective beliefs and works out new formulations that allow areas of convergence and divergence to locate on one single map—and not on two different cultural charts as heretofore. A Hindu-Christian theology takes cognizance of the changes that are taking place today and steers those very changes towards a common centre of assent and/or dissent. That the dialogue among religions often has been mere talk at cross-purposes, a mere clash between almost solipsistic monologues, is a well-known fact today.

From the Christian point of view, we witness the fact that many Christians seem to believe what until now appeared to be exclusively Hindu tenets and yet do not want to cease to be Christians. From the Hindu point of view, we recognize the fact that many Hindus believe what until now seemed a Christian monopoly and convert it into part and parcel of the Hindu *dharma*. These people are not the worst Hindus or Christians. On the contrary, they show an unmistakable sign of vitality, for the characteristic of life is the power of assimilation. The food comes from outside, but it is *converted*, and whatever its origin, once assimilated it becomes our own body, our personal being.

Let us first examine the locus of orthodoxy and then indicate a couple of examples: the traditional Orthodox and Roman Catholic belief in the Virgin Birth and the traditional Hindu belief in the successive creations and destructions of the entire universe.

Orthodoxy is the crystallized and harmonious expression of the belief of one particular religion at a given time. Each orthodoxy provides a map that allows its believers to orientate themselves in the religious territory and travel safely from place to place to their ultimate end.

Now, certainly the map is not the territory, and religious generally recognize that they are more than just orthodoxies. Orthodoxy fulfils the important function of helping to locate heterodoxy. Heterodoxy appears when the map is unfaithful to the reality of the territory. No wonder that each religious tradition watches carefully against such unfaithfulness. It could easily lead the human pilgrim into confusion, chaos, hell.

On the other hand, maps can be only more or less accurate, their scales may vary and they may reflect only one particular aspect of the territory: sometimes roads, mountains and rivers may be enough to orientate the traveller, at other times urban agglomerations and human habitats may suffice. Those maps may not resemble one another, yet one alone may not be enough to guide the pilgrim to his end. Maps may be different, but this fact *alone* does not prove that the territory is not the same.

Furthermore,—and here the geographical metaphor soars into the realm of sound— there are different and yet orthodox maps which are like musical scores: they represent the same music, but in different keys.

This much may suffice to stress the importance, flexibility and relativity of orthodoxy.

A Hindu-Christian theology is not a new religion, but creates a new orthodoxy; it strikes a new key and sounds a music which is old and new at the same time. Those whose ear is trained may discover the same music in a different key. Those whose ear is still more educated may enjoy the variety and fur—

ther discover that the new key has played Hindu and Christian tunes in a creative way.

Let us take an example from each tradition. The belief in the Virgin Birth, as the belief in the Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus without Joseph's biological intervention, - this is the text. But it is the *intext* of Mary's virginity that will be a living symbol for the believer. And this on two accounts: the *bhaktic* and the *jñānic*. On account of devotion the Virgin Birth along with all the other prerogatives of Mary will make of her a living and loving symbol of: Mother of God and Men. Queen of Angels, the most perfect creature that ever issued from the hands of God, etc. This symbol performs a rich and polyvalent function: divine Motherhood, protectress, personal relationship with the super-human and yet human, sublimation of sex, etc.

On the level of doctrine, orthodoxy offers a coherent pattern, and in it everything is related. The Virgin Birth is a direct consequence, within a certain cosmological, anthropological and metaphysical pattern, of the central Christian belief. Mary's hymen was unbroken because she had no intercourse with Joseph in order to give birth to Jesus. The reason is to signify that Jesus was really the Son of God and not just an adopted one, and therefore in his flesh he came directly from God. Now, because the Father had 'already' begotten him from eternity, it was left to the Holy Spirit to 'overshadow' Mary, fecundate her and let Jesus be really the perfect hypostatic union in the words of later Councils. Jesus could be thus the universal Redeemer and not a divinised idol. Further, Mary's divine maternity rescued Jesus from being only the Messiah of Israel and therefore saved Christianity from being a kind of Reformed Judaism. At the same time Jesus being a real son of Mary, the Virgin Birth became the real symbol against any docetic interpretation and a gnostic temptation of flight from this world and denial of the value of matter. It is the same Marian privilege that was seen in direct connection with the Resurrection of the Flesh. What is more, a strict monotheism cannot explain the divine fecundation of Mary. It had to be the Holy Spirit so that the Father remains the immutable Godhead and God the Son the Divine Incarnation. We could go on and on in this vein relating everything to the Virgin Birth. This tenet is thus directly connected with the Trinity, the

central insights of Christology, the reality of the World, the belief in history, etc. etc. What the believer believes is not a biological text, but a religious *intext*.

Now, it is not too difficult to discover that on both accounts the tenet of the Virgin Birth rests on a number of assumptions that make it both meaningful and fragile. Meaningful as a powerful symbol, fragile as dependent on contingent assumptions. We can play the same music on many keyboards.

First of all, history witnesses a migration of symbols in the life of civilizations and also within a single religious tradition. What once upon a time was a living symbol-bearer of life and meaning may later become, or elsewhere be, irrelevant. What generally happens is a slow degradation of symbols and a partial or total substitution for them. In our case, Mary was for the traditional Christian believer a powerful symbol for what in other traditions took or takes the form of the Goddess, the divine Mother, the Mother of God, the Dame of chivalry, the Spouse of the consecrated souls, the Eternal Feminine, Sex, etc.

On the doctrinal level there is a similar shift in the framework of reference. We may assume that the relations between biology and God are less gross; we may equally assume that the Divinity of Christ is equally Trinitarian but more as a result of a human development and of the event of the Resurrection than of biological factors. Or we may consider that the very idea of an almost anthropomorphic God should be purified so that Christ's centrality and importance could be equally or better held without the mental scaffolding of the Mediterranean cosmology of the first centuries of our era. Or further, we may consider Christ the highest symbol, and interpret the expression of Son of God, Lord of History, Redeemer of Mankind, Saviour of the World in a meaningful way without the metaphysical assumptions of Marian devotion.

Where does one draw the line? At the rupture of the hymen or at the existence of God? History shows that each period has had a different threshold of orthodoxy and for this reason one understands that Christianity has ultimately formulated the question of orthodoxy stressing the will and intention more than the intellect. There are Christians who have left the Catholic

Church because of the Encyclicals *Humani generis* or *Humanae vitae*, while other people profess themselves radical humanists without any place for a metaphysical God and yet confess themselves to be members of the same Church. They live in the same myth without sharing the same logos.

The Christian Virgin Birth seen from a Hindu perspective may appear either a pallid counterpart of the belief in the goddess and of a *śakti*-theology or as a remnant of a non-historical myth at the source of a historical tradition.

The search for a common language does not mean mere translation – of the Marian dogmas in this case – into a foreign language, but finding a wider or deeper concept or myth that would enable us to understand a universal phenomenon (*theotokos*) without deforming its concreteness (Mary). The first step in doing this consists in integrating the immediate context into the *text* so that we can understand its meaning, grasping the whole *intext*, and from there find an encompassing context (*texture*) that would permit the extrapolation of a cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Let us examine a parallel example within the Hindu tradition: the belief in the indefinite creations and destructions of worlds. Seen in foreign categories this belief may seem to deny the ultimate seriousness of temporal events, perhaps their reality and certainly the uniqueness of the historical unfolding of the universe, especially of human beings. Its text may appear to degrade human dignity, for it seems to make every individual merely an infinitely repeated automatic case in an infinite succession of worlds, thus denying the sacred uniqueness of the human person. Seen from a Hindu perspective, on the other hand, this *intext* symbolizes the contingency of this world and the need to transcend – not to deny – time and space in order to reach the other shore: Being.

The circularity of time, as a metaphor for the recurring character of the temporal events in the world, stands for the experience of both the cosmic perdurance of my being, and the ontological immortality of the I, of an I which is not my psychological ego and which is a support of universal Consciousness and Life. I am not an ephemeral passing ego in a straight line

of cosmic events. I am – and I can reach that consciousness – a living witness, a perduring factor in the evolving of the cosmos. That is why all my actions have repercussions in the entire unfolding of a cosmic cycle. I feel divinely unique. Furthermore, the ‘mortal’ part of myself is not destined to perish or to disappear; it is a constitutive part of the cosmos and not just a grain of dust lost or left behind in the immensity of the material universe or the human ocean. My material being is never lost. It will not perish; it will come again and again until the last atom of the universe lasts. If it lasts for ever, then for ever; if it lasts only for one *kalpa*, then for one *kalpa*; if the following *kalpa* is born out of the ashes of the present one, then my material being will be there again: a purified *rayi* (matter), and certainly not as the psychological egocentric consciousness that my ego sometimes tends to interpret itself. My being is then unique and important, not just a negligible worm, a number quickly left behind in the infinity of the succeeding beings: it is qualitatively different. The circularity of time redeems time from its mere quantitative grips to give to it a qualitative face. I share in it. It is not only a happy end that matters, but a fulfilled life.

Furthermore in the measure that my ego ‘shares in the I’, that ‘I become’ realized, I enjoy ontological immortality. There is in me (without being ‘me’, but being *the I*) there is in me *brahman*, or *ātman* (not an *ahamkāra*) that transcends the circle of *samsāra*, of births and rebirths. The discovery of the temporal dimension makes ‘me’ share in that unique source, the I. But this divine destiny is not bound cosmologically; it is untouched by *karma* and only in so far as I get rid of my *karma* do I have a participation in it.

This belief in the circularity of time or the infinite succession of worlds is held mainly for three reasons: ethical, religious and mystical.

If this obviously fleeting and contingent world were only one single world running in a straight and irrepeatable line, we would suffer the most gross cosmic injustice: a display of breakable material in an unbreakable order. Any mistake on the contingent plane would have an absolute repercussion. Any sin on the temporal level would have an eternal significance. If things

do not come again, if the occasions do not repeat themselves, if we are not given another chance, the seriousness of life on earth would be unbearable, the weight of our responsibility crushing, the (divine) order of things unjust and blasphemous.

Further, time is circular: temporal things evolve and come again, because we are also an intemporal core that is truly liberated when we pierce the crust of time and escape *samsāra*. Religion is precisely the way to transcend time and to be liberated from its grips. The temporal succession of the worlds is what reveals to us that we *are* more than just *samsāric*, temporal, worldly.

The mystical reason is connected with the religious one. The circularity of time makes us immediately aware that we are more than temporal. The point B which in an indefinite number of cosmic cycles would correspond identically to a previous point A, cannot be different from A. The only possible difference would be, by definition, the temporal one. But even the time factor must be identical, since it is the cycle that defines time. In other words, the point B is the point A: the second round of time is identical with the first. And yet the fact that we are able to be aware of this opens us up to the transtemporal core of our being. Time is circular because it is contingent. We see it coming and going because of our transtemporal nature.

Here again we have metaphysical insights based on cosmological assumptions. We cannot totally demythologize any belief: we remythicize old beliefs when their framework changes. We cannot have any metaphysics without its inspiring physics. But equally we cannot have any physics without an underlying metaphysics. That is why when the one changes, the other needs reformation.

It is in this encounter of anthropologies and metaphysics that the problem of a Hindu-Christian theology becomes extremely important and exceedingly delicate.

You are an African (anthropological invariant) whatever you believe; now it is daylight (cosmological invariant) whatever the sun, the moon and the stars may be; your body is going to lose its living human shape (metaphysical invariant) however we may explain it. What makes a Christian Christian and a Hindu

Hindu? Mere ethnicity will not do; nor mere will alone. Is it simply a few more or less elusive tenets? The obedience to an institution or the membership to an organization? Where do we situate the religious dimension of man? What are the anthropological, cosmological and metaphysical coefficients of Man's beliefs?

One thing is certain: the ground is slippery; we are on quicksand. We cannot bypass the credal problem, but we cannot absolutize it either. Our problem here is not so much one of finding plausible comparisons or convincing homologies as one of discovering a horizon wide enough to serve as the proper context (*texture*) for the respective *intexts* of the two traditions in each particular instance.

We do not yet possess this common language, but we can begin to understand and accept each other's dogmas inasmuch as they can be inserted in our own categories of understanding. They can be inserted in our own categories of understanding inasmuch as we enlarge and deepen them. A vital circle!

This mutual understanding does not confuse creeds, but allows beliefs of the Hindus to be believable to Christians and *vice versa*. To be believable is not yet to be believed, because the links of one belief with all other beliefs of the tradition are not yet established. A creed is not a kaleidoscopic collection of bits and pieces, but a continuous integral of living beliefs.

The process of how this understanding of *intexts* comes about constitutes the entire dynamism of the Hindu-Christian theology. Rather than elaborate now a Hindu-Christian theological hermeneutics let us adduce a pair of examples (Trinity and karma), without forgetting that we are not proposing to replace existential beliefs with essential believables.

Let us first formulate a Trinitarian belief in a form that no fundamental objection can be raised from either side. Let us describe the believable aspect of the belief in the Trinity.

First of all, the Trinitarian insight helps to overcome a personalistic monotheism which could hardly avoid anthropomorphic traits in the Divine. The Trinity is not one 'individual'.

Secondly, the Trinity is not there to abolish all the gods and kill all super-human beings, but to direct our attention to the ultimate Mystery. The Trinity as total 'self' immolation does not 'know' jealousy.

Thirdly, the Trinity liberates the Divine from any static substantiality. The Trinity is pure relationship. There is nothing substantially exclusive, 'sub-standing' in any divine 'person'. The Trinity is the expression of the Divine life that is infinite communication, total donation, immolation, sacrifice. The Trinity appears to us as *saguna*; but primordially it is *nirguna*. It does not primarily express Divine qualities or attributes, but the very nature of the Divine dynamism in the utter simplicity of the 'explosion' of 'Life', or 'Light', or 'Love'.

Fourthly, the Trinitarian insight tells us that the Divine is both yonder being (*asat*, the Father, the Source) and this side of being (*sat*, the Son, the Receiver). It tells us further that this communication, this emanation, creation, production, generation of Being never ends because it is being constantly 'renewed' (*ananta*, the Spirit, the Gift).

Fifthly, the Trinity addresses itself to dissolve the excruciating dilemma of the *vivarta* or *pariṇāmavāda*. The world is neither a second 'Being', outflowing from the Real, nor is it a mere illusory state of no consistency whatsoever. If creation were the action of a monolithic supreme principle it would be either a real transformation of itself (*pariṇāma*) (thus ceasing to be absolute) or sheer illusory modification (*vivarta*) (thus contradicting common sense). "By one and the same act the Father begets the Son and creates the World", says Christian tradition. "Everything has been made by the Word", affirm Hindu and Christian Scriptures. "Three-fourths of *Puruṣa* ascended high, one fourth took birth again down here", asserts the Ṛg Veda.

Sixthly, the Trinity is a qualified expression of the holistic character of all that there is and our participation in it. The Trinity is neither tritheism nor a mere modalistic view of the Real in which owing to our incapacity, we 'see' as three what in reality is only one. Nor does it allow us to say that 'creator' and 'creation' are two, or for that matter one. And it is the temporal and spatial adventure '*ad extra*' of the Word and the

Spirit that exists by 'constantly' denying its apparent duality (when seen statically freezing the very flow of Reality).

Seventhly, the Trinity is also *saguna*, in so far as we think it and in so far as we are 'in' it. Reality is Trinity and not a monolithic Divine Being because 'in' the Trinity there is also a place for us, *saguna*, without impingement on the absolute purity of *nirguna*. Different theologies will try to explain the whys and the hows, but the Trinitarian insight insists on giving reality to the world without weakening the unicity of the Divine.

Something similar can be said regarding Karma.

First of all the Karmic insight helps to overcome an individualistic view of reality which can barely avoid falling into solipsism. The Karmic communion of the world does not allow ontological monads.

Secondly, Karma is not there to abolish human freedom, but to recognize its limits and remind us of our limited resources. Karma is the very field of our free actions.

Thirdly, Karma liberates the world of the burden of absolute property, as if there were unrelated things. There is nothing that is the individual's exclusive property. Nothing is opaquely mine in a Karmic world view.

Fourthly, the Karmic insight tells us about the solidarity among all beings. It tells us that the world is a set of relationships in which our actions have universal repercussions and our responsibility is a cosmic one. Each being shares in the destiny of the entire universe.

Fifthly, Karma addresses itself not to solving the riddle of the nature of evil (evil is precisely what cannot be explained — otherwise we would explain it away), but to explain the how of its functioning so as to offer a plausible explanation for inequalities and a certain kind of suffering.

Sixthly, Karma is a qualified expression of the contingent character of this universe. Karma is the ultimate name for the mutability of this world, and thus for its contingency.

Seventhly, Karma is that link which unites us to, and distinguishes us from, the Absolute. This latter is the Lord of Karma and its ultimate cause. He ('it') is the only 'thing' not subjected to Karma. The gods and all creatures are Karmic beings, but there is a non-Karmic reality: the Absolute.

This does not mean that we all should believe in Karma, the circularity of time or the Trinity. Rather, it indicates that such doctrines are no longer unsurpassable walls: there are ways of interpretation that may allow the followers of one tradition to share in the other's insights, perhaps to complement them and even eventually to come to a mutual fertilization. Each melody is complete (we should beware of cacophonies) but we may be called upon to play in an ever new Divine symphony. *Pūrṇam idam.*

VII. The liturgical question

If Christians are allowed — and even encouraged — to pray for the Hindus, they should also pray with them and with their prayers. To do this they should previously know and understand them properly. If Hindus are performing sacrifice for the *loka-samgraha*, for the sustaining of the whole world, there is no reason to exclude those who in good faith would like to join them. Equally they need to know and understand the world and the living beings for which they offer worship. There is no truly human fellowship and communication unless it is a *communicatio in sacris* — in whatever form this communion may take place. As there are different interpretations of the sacred this is an open question. Human communication is truly human if it touches the specifically *humanum*: to eat, to mate, to fight, to walk together and to exchange meaningful signals is not a human privilege. We reach the specifically human level when we speak to each other so that this speech includes and connotes transcendence, i. e., when it is constitutively open to an ever More. This is the proper field of religion, whatever form it may take. We communicate on the truly human level when the infinite is a partner in our exchange, when we are in liturgical synergy. Real commerce is not to exchange merchandise only, but goods, i. e., part of ourselves as well. Human communication demands a sharing of our uniqueness.

Let us move now from theoretical considerations and concentrate on a single example of liturgical collaboration. I do not apologize for utilizing the word liturgy to express this kind of activity, and shall not justify why cult is not just ceremony or liturgy, merely rubrics. I understand by liturgy the action (work, *ergon*, *karma*) of the corporate or full person (*laos*, people) undertaken with the collaboration of the two other worlds (the Divine and the Material) for the ultimate welfare of the universe in any of its parts: a *karmamārga*, a way, a ritual, towards the ultimate Action.

This is one way in which a Hindu-Christian theology could make an important contribution to guide and direct the *karmamāndins* of our times. By emphasizing the importance of the temporal and by seeing human initiative as indispensable for the fullness of human life and the shaping of the future, the secular mentality has made many of the 'religious' cults appear as private and irrelevant, if not sectarian, a little beating of drums, mostly for the psychological benefit of the believing participants. In fact many of those cults have almost forgotten their cosmotheandric function to build up heaven *and* earth. This is but one example of the increasing irrelevance of traditional religions when left in isolation.

A Hindu-Christian theology could help rescue the liturgical dimension of man, the co-builder of the universe, from the stagnation of so many of the rituals, which at their best have fortified themselves behind the individual's rites of birth, initiation, marriage, death and have given up the social, political, scientific, let alone the cosmic, aspects of human life. To be sure, there are still 'Holy Weeks', 'Melas' and temple festivals; there are still Lourdes, Puris, Jerusalems and Vārāṇasīs; there are still Odo Casals and Vasudeva Agravalas; but they become more and more marginal in the life of man. I am not advocating rājasūyas, aśvamedhas and theocracies of any kind, or any mingling of Church and State. Rather, I am saying that religion and life belong together and that any sectarian view of religion, any limited conception which makes religion irrelevant, cripples life.

Liturgy is not an other-wordly affair, nor a merely human-spiritual endeavour. It is a cosmotheandric activity in which the building of the city of Man is as essential as a participation in

the heavenly festival. The Soma is the drink of the Gods, but Humans are also invited to partake of it, and in the last analysis it is a juice from mother Earth. The Eucharist is as much bread as the body of Christ. Without the Bread there would be no Body. Any authentic liturgy embraces always the three worlds.

The challenges here are evident. The Hindu should underscore the temporal and anthropological factors of the everlasting *dharma*. The Christian should raise *dykaiosyne* (righteousness) to the rank of a theological and cosmological virtue. The modern more secular formulation of the same problem would be the study and implementation of *justice* as the most urgent condition for the dignity — and happiness — of the human person. An example that I only mention to make myself understood, is that of finding a corresponding Indian counterpart for the Latin American *Teología de la liberación*. The trilogy of *dharma*, *dykaiosyne* and *ius* should form a deeper unity capable of overcoming the menacing religious and secular schizophrenia of modern Man.

A purely Hindu effort along traditional lines without the Christian input and the secular stimulation may very easily miss the point, run out of inspiration and become ineffective. A merely Christian effort without the Hindu contribution and modern spirit may produce more harm than good and even become counter-effective. An exclusive secular effort towards a better world without the Hindu or Christian background may end in a kind of short lived — and probably utopian — liberation that may prove not only irritatingly shallow, but ultimately wrong. The same applies to other religions. In a word, religions are at the service of man and not *vice versa*. "The Sabbath is made for Man" and not the other way round. "The *puruṣa*, indeed is this All, what has been and what is to be."

The efforts of all three are needed here. It is not merely a question of social justice, nor is it only a question of an equally utopian human Christian dignity or again a highly spiritualized and temporally postponed *mokṣa*. Although this was said at the beginning, we have to recall here once again the necessary contribution of other religious traditions as well.

Man in India today, owing to a sociologically understandable constellation, is torn apart by tradition, modernity, vested interests, crystallised habits, human exploitation and new ideals. This situation cries for the highest priority in finding a just solution. Justice — as *dharma*, justification, liberation — is a major problem and should be a primordial concern for any responsible human being with an intellectual-spiritual vocation. I have proposed elsewhere a comprehensive 'theology of *dharma*'; *dharma* understood not only as duty and righteousness but equally as justification and justice on all levels and in all areas. This cannot be done by an intra-Hindu reflection alone or by a Christian study exclusively. It is the proper task of a contemporary Hindu-Christian theology. The struggle for justice in India today cannot be only a secular ideal or a separate Hindu and/or Christian aim — or the exclusive aim of any other religion, for that matter. It must be a concentrated and co-ordinated effort — on the theoretical as well as the practical level — in which no one should fear that the balance inclines in favour of any of the existing religions or ideologies. The problem is too serious to allow sectarianism. My suggested *Rtatattva* should study and establish this cosmotheandric *ordo*.

Both, on the theoretical and practical levels it is a liturgical problem, a ritual question. Theology implies method, and method (*paddhati*, *upāya*) also means ritual, liturgy.

This point deserves all our attention. When theory and praxis cease to be in vital communication and mutual inspiration theory soon becomes obsolete and praxis degenerates. The divorce between the two is a sign of cultural decadence. For too long now, the main places of inspiration for intellectuals and pandits in theological areas has been the comfortable ivory towers of pure speculation about already formulated dogmas and the secluded wooden desks of abstract commentaries on already written texts. Certainly theory cannot thrive without a certain distance and non-attachment, but it is equally true that divorced from the praxis, the theoretical pursuits become barren.

To come to our point. A Hindu-Christian theology, born in this time of distress, of sub-human conditions of life, and yet also of a heightened degree of consciousness regarding common

human issues and of increased sensitivity concerning problems of justice, must be concerned with the situation of the ordinary man. It is man's thirst for liberation, not so much from his body as from man-made exploitation, and his hunger for salvation, not so much in an afterlife as in his present-day structures, that have to inspire the Hindu-Christian Theology. This cannot be done by just reflecting on the past. It requires an involvement with the present and a commitment to the future.

Rta is not a divine order if it is not equally human and cosmic. *Sōtēria* is not salvation if it does not make man whole. *Justice* is a mockery if it is satisfied with a merely theoretical system. The liturgy of a Hindu-Christian theology is not a mere song of praise to Viśvakarman or homely worship around a comfortable table. Nor is it a simple social struggle for one-dimensional and limited gains. All these needs must be integrated, but what is more important, the full sense of participation in a cosmotheandric activity has to be brought back to the people, because it starts from them: a cosmotheandric activity in which all the *dyandvas* (dichotomies) are overcome, not overnight, certainly, but in a realistic hope nurtured by the practical results of a fuller and freer human life.

An example: No people can live as a people without 'popular' celebrations, although popular feasts have met only the benign neglect and superior tolerance of theologians. Hindus celebrate dozens of major feasts and Christians the same. Muslims have their festivities and each *sampradāya* has its proper ones. There is no weekday without a holiday somewhere not only in the vast countryside but also in the congested cities (like Vārāṇasī, for instance). To suppress them all or to celebrate only those of the larger communities would be a blatant injustice, causing real harm to the lives of the people. Keeping them all creates not only technical problems in the modern rhythm of life but widens the gap between communities and fosters communalism. Our theology, discovering and interpreting the deep human meaning behind each feast, could create: common rejoicing (so that nobody is left out); discreet and different degrees of participation (so that nobody unduly interferes); pave the way for possible co-ordinations (so that ontonomic mergers and concelebrations could take place); an invitation to a fuller discovery and

celebration of the festive nature of man and his communion with the cosmic and the Divine (so that the negative opposition between traditional sacredness and modern secularity could be transformed into a positive source of inspiration). Unless we have a common language, unless we discover together the common goals and locate the divergences, we are going to be bound either to neutralize each other — to say the least — or to engage in lopsided action. Either will fail to help the concrete person who, willy nilly, is enmeshed in the complex situation of today's India and the world at large.

VIII. The mystical approach

Let us assume that the Trinity is the central Christian tenet, the pivot on which the entire Christian life hinges. Let us also assume that the Advaitic intuition is the central tenet of at least a considerable part of Hindu spirituality. Both tenets are formulated in theological and philosophical propositions, and refined *ad nauseam* by the different scholastic positions. They can be learned as doctrines, but there is also the possibility of experiencing the kernel of truth they want to convey. Dogma is not just the affirmation of a certain statement held to be true. It is the formulation in intellectual terms of an intuition, the fruit of an experience that is considered central to the life of the people concerned. To say 'I believe in Advaita' or 'I believe in the Trinity' is ambiguous. It can mean that I hold those doctrines to be true because they belong to the package of my own tradition (*paramparā*). On the other hand, I may find them plausible because they furnish a reasonable working hypothesis for formulating an entire world-view: I find them plausible, useful, convincing. Belief in this case is an inferior type of knowledge: a knowledge by hearsay, by authority, by congruence, from tradition (because it has been handed down to me), etc. But it can also mean that I believe in Advaita or the Trinity because I have 'seen', experienced, the truth of what these words try to convey; because I have tasted, as it were, their reality and discovered more than just their plausibility, their coherence with other more or less evident truths, I have had an immediate vision, intuition, of what those words stand for. This belief is a higher form of knowledge. One of the classical names for it is mystical knowledge or mystical intuition: the direct experience.

Assuming the centrality of these two dogmas, the existence of a Hindu-Christian theology depends on the possible, although perhaps qualified, compatibility between these intuitions.

If Hinduism and Christianity are not well represented by Advaita and Trinity, we should find some other central principle or principles, such as Karma and Incarnation, Brahman and God, etc. on which to focus. The point is that a Hindu-Christian theology is not an encounter between marginal theological concepts but a unified, although not a complete or totally systematic, theology that allows the main intuitions of the two traditions to be expressed in a common language.

Advaita and the Trinity have been chosen as the most central and difficult examples. First it must be said that we cannot affirm *a priori* the incompatibility of the two insights. We cannot make such a claim because the two experiences purport to be ultimate, and therefore, with no further ground of reference on which to base any *a priori* affirmation.

Secondly, we cannot either assert that the acceptance of one of the two conceptions (the Advaitic or the Trinitarian) excludes, *a priori*, the other one. This would be an *a priori secundum quid*, but this is not the case, because the only *a prioristic* impossibility would occur if the one experience were the logical contradiction of the other. This however is not true for two reasons: (a) because any experience is above its expression and thus beyond any 'diction' that would enable any contradiction; (b) because the respective 'dictions' are in fact not contradictory. The Advaitic conception of the Ultimate is contradictory to the plain negation of the Advaitic conception of the Ultimate. The Trinitarian conception is contradictory to the plain negation of the Trinitarian conception. The precise question at stake is whether the two are compatible in spite of the non-logical contradiction of their respective formulations.

We shall have to examine then *a posteriori* the two conceptions, basing our analysis on their own merits.

This examination can proceed on the two above-mentioned levels: on the merely mental (doctrinal) plane, or on the experi-

ential one. The former will analyse direct logical consequences of the two conceptions and show the presence or absence of contradictions. This is not only long and hazardous because of the resistance supralogical principles offer to mere logic, but also because of the plurivalence of any hermeneutical procedure. If you are inclined to find contradictions, you will tend to interpret the consequences in this direction; while if the contrary is the case, your hermeneutics will proceed in the opposite direction.

Furthermore, the last instance of any hermeneutical approach will depend on the immediate understanding of the fundamental tenet, i. e., on the experience of the principle. We are thus left with the ultimate criterion of the personal experience.

Is it possible to have both the Advaitic and the Trinitarian experiences? It has already been said that we cannot affirm *a priori* that it is impossible. We are here thrown back to the experiences themselves, to facts, to witnesses.

Certainly there are people who are prepared to bear such witness. We should not exclude, of course, the possibility of a hallucination or the mere illusion of having had such an experience. But this is an altogether different problem. The validation of an experience is a problem in itself into which we cannot enter here. It is sufficient for us to say that there are true cases of this experience, and therefore it is not impossible.

A second point is that this ultimate experience cannot be multiple. It is not as if one first has an Advaitic experience, switches it off and 'plugs into' the Trinitarian hotline. It is a single unique experience that an individual claims subsequently to be able to express in the conceptual framework of the two traditions. This does not mean that there is a dichotomy between contents and container, meanings and names, the experience and its expression. This relation is deeper than what a mere nominalistic position would assert. It is a relation constitutive of reality itself. This is why the problem is so difficult and so important. It is not a problem of mere reformulation but of truly creative translation. Ultimately it is a new experience. But let us proceed in a certain order.

If I am convinced merely on the mental plane of the truth of these two dogmas I may try to find ways of putting them together, of overcoming apparent contradictions, or of formulating the difficulties of their differences, etc.

But it will be only when I have gone through the personal experience that the synthesis (for lack of better word) will begin to be realized in myself so as to bear witness to the truth of these two tenets. All that I say or think or write will bear the imprint of that synthesis. Something will have happened in me that will have more than just individual repercussions. My person transcends the limits of my individualism. Man, as the epiphany of Being, is more than just an individual. If I, standing within one tradition, succeed in also having the experience proper to the other tradition, something happens in the very heart of the two traditions: an anthropological link with ontological repercussions is being established. The waters of the two religions begin to mix, an opening has been made. It will still need intellectual formulation, mental qualifications, proper language and acceptable forms of expression, but the wall of separation, the 'excommunication' will have been broken. He who has such an experience may die a martyr at the hands of the followers of one of the two traditions, or perhaps at his own hands, unable to bring to the light of the intellect what has been 'born' in the depths of his or her being. An Al Hallaj, a Brahmanandhav Upādhyāya are names that come to mind.

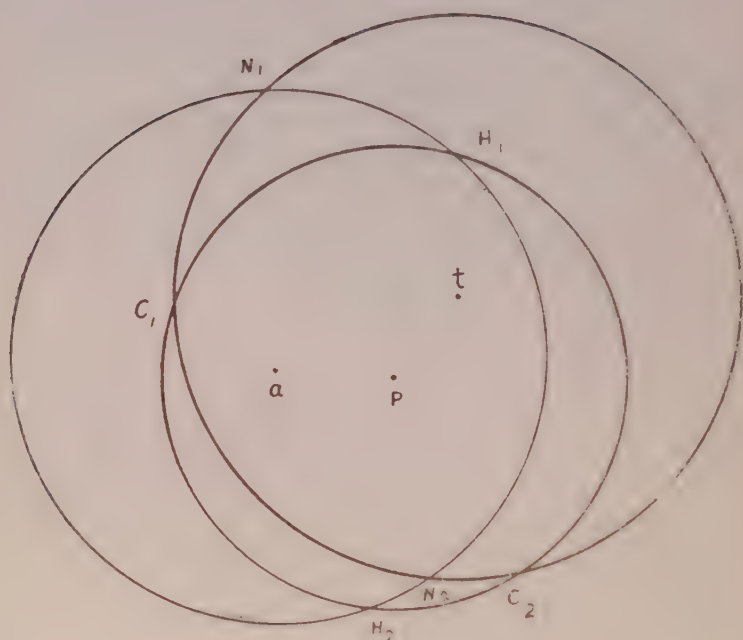
The intra-religious dialogue becomes fruitful: it produces a new fruit.

Sometimes it is only one of the two dogmas that is experientially discovered. If it is the dogma of the 'other' religion, the person concerned will become uncomfortable in his own tradition. He will be more at home in the other religion and if other factors work also in the same direction, he may eventually become a convert. If you discover the truth of the Advaitic revelation so that Advaita for you is a matter of experience, and, at the same time, you, a Christian, have only a 'formal belief' in the Trinity, you will slowly slip from Christianity and become a Hindu in as much as you can. Or *vice versa*. The mutual fecundation takes place only if you succeed in undergoing one

experience' in such a new way that it encompasses the twofold intellectual form.

Let us imagine that you have such a Trinitarian and Advaitic experience. It will reveal itself in saying that you have somewhat seen, tasted, experienced the nature of the ultimate reality as Advaitic and Trinitarian. Your experience will, of course, not use this language. You will perceive the nature of the real in some manner and concomitantly will make use of the language offered by the two traditions to say that your experience seems fairly represented from what you can gather from reading the traditional formulations. I have said concomitantly and not subsequently because none of us, as historical beings, begins our experience from a cultural and religious zero point. The pattern of understanding and the framework of sensitivity are not only made use of after the experience, they are previous to the experience and, of course, condition it. For this reason the experience we are dealing with escapes all efforts at experimentation. It is a primary given, a *proton* in the History of Religions. At any rate it will still remain for you to find out whether your experience coalesces with what the two orthodox expressions convey. You may find one language more helpful than the other, or you may even be convinced that the formulation of your experience is covered, say 80% with the Trinitarian formulation and 75% with the Advaitic. Further, you may be convinced that those 80% and 75% coalesce only in a 70%, so that your experience shows the form of the following figure:

Fig. 1


$$\begin{aligned} \text{Intersections: } at &= \mathbf{N} \\ tp &= \mathbf{C} \\ ap &= \mathbf{H} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Your experience represented by the circle with centre in p is Trinitarian in the segment $C_1 H_1 C_2 N_2 C_1$ and it is Advaitic in $H_1 N_2 H_2 C_1 H_1$ and it is proper to you, being neither orthodox Advaitic and/or Trinitarian in $H_2 N_2 C_2 H_2$. You belong to the two traditions in $N_2 C_1 H_1 N_2$. And the two traditions have in common: $N_1 H_1 N_2 C_1 N_1$

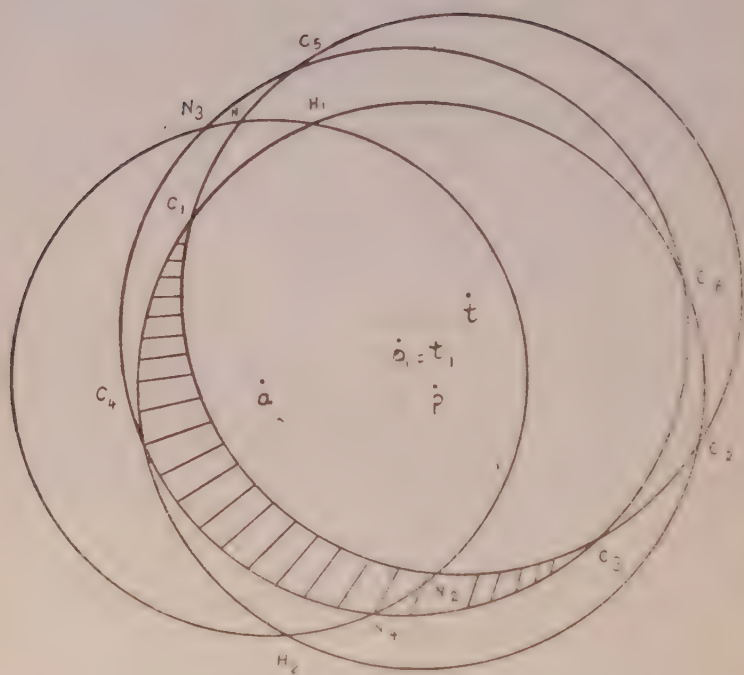
- (1) a = advaita
 p = personal
 t = trinity
 o = original

H = Hinduism
C = Christianity
N = Neutral

To be sure, an experience cannot be broken down in such compartments. It is only in the formulation and reflective consciousness of it that you may find that what you perceive can be brought into harmony with the two different traditions as in the example. The problem consists in finding an adequate formulation which is acceptable to the traditions concerned. For one thing is certain, dogmas do not permit any patchwork design. Each intuition is simple. It is only its formulation that admits the necessary qualifications. In Figure 1, the intuition can only be a circle (it has to have a centre) and not a segment. Only one of the circles with their centres in t , a or p can be the real case. It is obvious that your individual experience, represented in the circle whose centre is p , has little chance in changing the circles of points t and a , and therefore, in bringing them together. Here is where the theological task begins and where history plays its role. If you are successful, one may expect a new circle o to emerge. It is a matter of actual experience whether this new circle will be closer to t , a or p . If your circle p is closer to t than to a , the chances of modifying t may be greater (circle o_1). On the other hand, if a is more flexible than t the new circle may come closer to a (circle o_2) (Cf. Fig. 2). Many other factors will be at play here, of course. The circle o , can also be a minimal circle o_3 inscribed within the common field N_2C, H, N_2 or a maximal circumscribing circle o_4 encompassing all three circles (cf. Fig. 3). This latter case may be a more humble and accurate representation of the Mystery which one must affirm gratuitously that it is not (yet)? experienced (or experienciable?).

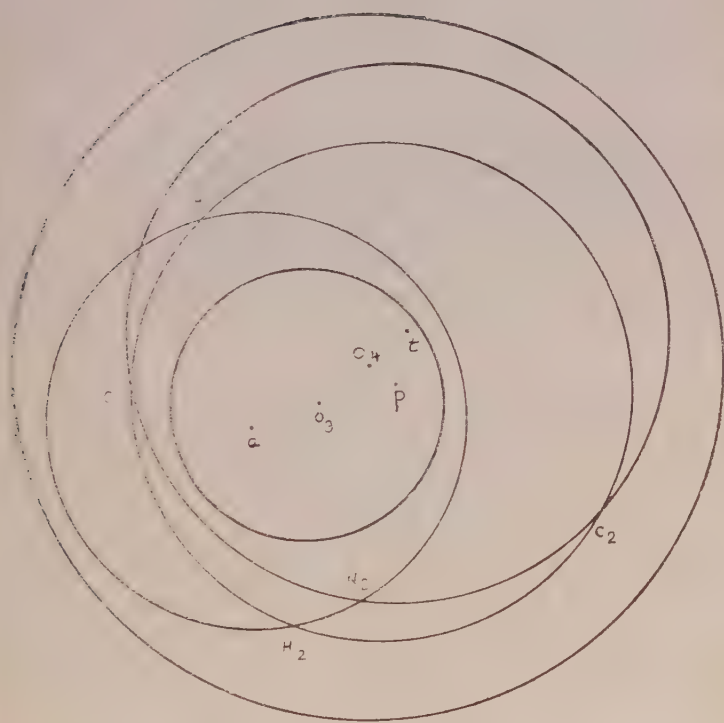
The second figure represents the situation of o_1 (and o_2 by implication), and the third figure that of o_3 and o_4 .

Fig. 2



The segments C_1 C_1 C_1 C_1 represent the positive change in the Trinitarian orthodoxy due to the influence of p . The segments C_3 C_6 C_2 C_3 represent the negative changes due to p . The segments C_5 C_2 C_6 C_5 the changes due to the internal exigencies of the new circle t_1 . Not to complicate the figure the circle o_2 has not been drawn.

Fig. 3



These figures represent what *de facto* has happened in the evolution and new formulation of many a dogma. What Chalcedon did *vis-à-vis* Nicea was something of the sort, and Rāmānuja *vis-à-vis* Śankara, also. This alone shows us that the possibility exists not only for a new circle t_1 to appear, but that instead of the two traditional circles a and t a third o or even a fourth o may be started. Figure 2 represents the new Trinitarian orthodox dogma t_1 . The history of religions offers ample examples of all possible cases: there are still pre-Chalcedonian Christians: Advaitins and Viśiṣṭādvaitins are not agreed, etc. Each one remains in his circle.

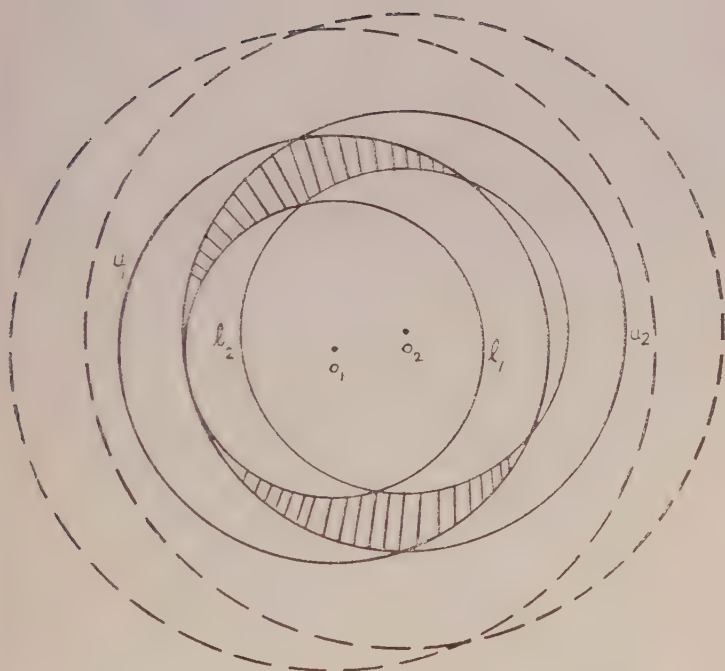
The possibilities should not be looked upon exclusively as negative, as if the ideal would be to have a single circle. No human experience can reasonably claim to have the key to all truth or to exhaust it. One of the most urgent tasks of our times is to accept this human situation, establishing ways of communication between the different centres of inspiration, experience, revelation. The unexperienceable circle o_1 may provide a hermeneutic model.

Ultimately there are as many circles as persons. Or putting it in my own language, the circles drawn by the myth coincide, while the circles made by the logos all have their own centres.

Actually, although we are generally conscious of a circle around our centre we are aware neither of the exact location of the centre nor of the circumference. Fig. 4 represents the actual encounter between two such insights: o_1 , and o_2 . Each side has an upper and a lower level of reflective consciousness (represented by the solid-line circumferences).

The striped segments represent the points of conscious and intellectual agreement; and the circular segments between circumferences l and u (area between the circles) the proper field of intellectual knowledge of each personal experience o .

Fig. 4



u = upper level of reflective consciousness
 l = lower level of reflective consciousness

After this phenomenological excursus we will try to formulate Advaitic and Trinitarian insights in a simple philosophical language.

Both dogmas stand for the radical ineffability of the Ultimate Mystery and both maintain that the only possible understanding of Ultimate Mystery transcends the normal functioning of our thinking categories. Both play with numbers in a non-numerical way. Advaita, says that 'it' is not two, without falling into a monolithic and static conceptual one. Trinity, says that 'it' has nothing to do with number three as there is *no thing* which can be called threefold. Further, both intuitions try to encompass the 'three worlds': the universe, ourselves, and the other divine pole. They are not mere objectifiable projections of a 'Godhead in itself', but incorporate our vision and our being. The ultimate Reality is non-dualistic because we are not a second being (there is no second); it is also the negation of the false dualism that appears when we idolize our perspective. We are also 'in', even in our *avidyā*, and yet we do not tarnish the simplicity of the Real. If it were monism there would be no place, not even for our appearance and ignorance. What has tarnished the luminosity of the Advaitic experience is its purely mental interpretation as monistic. Similarly, the Trinity does not stand for a secluded and incommunicable Divine Being, but it is an expression of the Divine Life shared: a sharing which is, without pantheistic confusion, into and by the entire reality, not excluding the spatio-temporal Body of the 'second person' who is maintained by the Divine immanence of the Spirit. This Body, in spatio-temporal becoming, is what some call creation. What has tarnished the transparency of the Trinitarian experience is its purely mental interpretation as monotheistic.

Furthermore, both intuitions solve in a surprising way what is probably the greatest intellectual impasse: that of the One and the Many. Both overcome the dialectical quandary not by transgressing against numerical dialectics (one or non-one), or by falling into irrationalism accepting contradiction (one and non-one), but by transcending both (neither one nor non-one). We intuit 'it' as One, but cannot think 'it' as one, nor as many: if as one, we would remain outside; if as many, we would destroy it. This is logical if we ourselves are involved in the

same process and in no way stand outside Reality. The very awareness of thinking presupposes an unthinkable subject of thinking, an unthought thinker.

The fact that this primordial intuition develops later on the lines of *saguna* and *nirguna* Brahman, on the one hand, and in Christological issues on the other, does not affect what we have discussed so far.

My principal point is not to analyze the contents or form of these two experiences, but to express the way in which human traditions may come to share similar insights and discover equivalent intuitions which could contribute to that lasting peace of religious concord dreamed by so many great souls and expressed so poignantly by a Nicolas of Cusa and so pathetically by a Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa, for instance.

Advaita and Trinity have been for long considered almost at the antipodes. No amount of mere investigation or scholarly research can bring them together. But if they spark in the heart and mind, if they flash in the authentic experience of someone who then succeeds in living it fully through, then any simple believer will find the harmony. Once an incarnation has taken place — has taken flesh, I should say — it enters into the Karma of a culture, goes its way and produces its fruit.

In actual fact what has been so highly and abstractly expressed in the preceding paragraphs takes place existentially in the lives of people in a more simple and spontaneous way. It is lived spirituality.

This introduces another important task of the Hindu-Christian theology: to foster practical ways of handling our concrete human condition. This is the proper function of spirituality. Not a speculation about doctrines, but a way of life.

We have already referred to the vital *circle* between theory and praxis in which they mutually influence each other. It is a vital circle, not a vicious one, because it is the newness of life that breaks the merely speculative impasse (you cannot swim, read, meditate if you don't *know* how to *do* it, but you'll never

know it if you don't do it). This theology, like any authentic theology, is theoretical and practical at the same time.

An example will spare us further elaborations.

Because of the historical development of the two traditions, meditation has been neglected in contemporary Christian spirituality, and religious-moral action on the *laukika* (or worldly sphere) in contemporary Hindu spirituality.

Now, this development has theoretical roots, but only the actual praxis will discover and eventually modify them.

Meditation, on the highest level of contemplation, implies not only more listening than 'praying', but also more silence than speech. Ultimately the thoughtless and will-free *dhyaṇa* has little compatibility with the representation of a 'personal' and loving God looking after his creatures. If you stop all dialogue you are implying that the *logos* is not ultimate.

Similarly, a religious involvement in the political and socio-economical world implies that this *samsāra* is ultimately important; as if it mattered not only on the karmic level, but also on the *pāramārthika*, and for the personal *mokṣa*.

When the Christian strives towards a life of pure contemplation and a Hindu strives towards a political theology both are transforming from within the traditional sociological common path of their respective traditions. This is not to say that there is no pure contemplation in Christianity or no sacred involvement in the temporal structures in Hinduism. It is only to stress that those ways of life have not been sufficiently emphasized and that the theoretical unfolding today depends on the praxis. It is this praxis that may slowly help the Christian to (re)acquire a transpersonal experience of the Godhead, and the Hindu to (re)discover the religious and ultimate dimensions of social action.

A Hindu Christian theology would not proceed *a priori* to construct a theology for a new life-style. It will channel the praxis to bring theoretical fruits and analyse the theory to produce a more balanced praxis.

Again it is evident that separate theologies may not be able to cope with this problem and similar ones. We need that kind of theology that we are trying to describe.

IX. Linguistic considerations

An actual Hindu-Christian theology is yet to be created; it can only come about as the result of a dialogical dialogue among different people. Unlike a single personality starting a new religion, this new theology is a corporate phenomenon. It is a symphony of many voices.

The enterprise cannot be said *a priori* to be impossible. We may not succeed, but there is no power on earth that can limit the growth and evolution of cultures and religions.

This Hindu-Christian theology is not concerned with finding a new 'terminology', but in discovering, creating, a *new language* capable of expressing the intuitions of the two traditions without doing undue violence to either. Only then can the needed mutual fecundation come spontaneously out of understanding and love. We must not forget that the Spirit works with free agents and moves freely the hearts and minds of those who sense the wind, although they do not know *whence* it comes or *how* it blows. The *ātman* discloses itself to whom it wills and only when the intuition dawns, can we utter: "it is".

A new language is not merely a new idiom or a lot of neologisms: it is a new form for looking at and being in the world; a new form of the manifold ways in which Reality realizes itself in man; a new way of being human. This new form, seen from inside where it evolved, will appear as a continuation of the old forms as a child appears as the continuation of the lives of his parents, and yet is a new creature. Seen from outside it looks like a break: an adult has little to do with his parents.

Some fundamental symbols based on a common horizon, a common myth, are necessary for this new language. I have elaborated elsewhere some categories extracted from a meditative study of the Upaniṣads and the Fourth Gospel. There may be other starting-points.

How do we speak a new language? Obviously it cannot be by any artificially concocted new technique. Even to do this we would need some prior tools of immediate signification, and these latter would be the real basic language and not the artificial one.

The birth of a new language is a natural process and today the fruit of an encounter of two already existing languages, or of a full-fledged one entering into a new recipient. Urdu could be an example of the former and English-American of the latter. In the Hindu-Christian theology two powerful streams meet. My contention is that this *saṅgam* is a sacred one and that it has the power to heal wounds of the past.

The incipient effort of some Christian theologians to 'teach' theology in the Indian vernaculars is a move in this direction. They will be immediately confronted with the inadequate and even impossible rendering of any traditional Christian intuition without the transformation of both the meaning of the original word and that of the word used.

The effort to translate traditional Hindu concepts into the European vernaculars has been done for over a century. Here I am also suspicious of the adequacy of many standard translations — not because of lack of scholarship, of course, but because the time was not ripe. Many of these translations were done at the peak of the colonial period and at one of the lowest ebbs of Western, especially Christian culture. To translate *dharma* as 'duty' and understand this in a predominantly Kantian sense, and to render *māyā* by "magic" and make it carry with it the ethnographic connotations of pre First World War European categories are obvious examples of imperfect interpretations.

But the question goes deeper than connotations. It touches the very roots of cultures and religions. The example of 'truth' is instructive. Within the Indo-European linguistic family alone we have at least four main directions: *alētheia* is an active operation of the mind, extracting and bringing forth the intellectual core that lies hidden in things; *veritas* and *Wahrheit* are epistemic perceptions of things lasting, being permanent, enduring the bite of time and the ups and downs of change; *truth* is much more a

moral attitude and a matter of the heart discovering things as trustworthy and reliable, even if this confidence is discovered by the mind; *satya(m)* has hardly any epistemic or moral overtones, rather it is the direct ontological manifestation of *sat*, Being, without the intermediary of a *manas* to bring it out: pure Beingness.

The consequences are so far-reaching that I may be spared enumerating them. *Satya*, for instance, is not the fruit of thinking (*alētheia*) but of letting being be; it is not the consequence of the recognition of an unchanging core (*veritas*), but the pure expression of what there is; it is not the result of a reflective confidence that things are going to be as they appear (*truth*), but the carefree and unimpeded flow of the being of what is; etc. The "Satya" that "will win" does not mean the triumph of the intelligible or the superiority of the immutable, or the primacy of morals, but the victory of Being – when it is true to itself, when it is true Being.

But this is not an isolated example. *Brahman*, *sat*, *ṛta* and equally *charis*, *dykaiosyne*, *pneuma*, omitting words like *ṛṇa*, *rayi*, *agape*, *eschaton*, or more general ones like *agni*, *theos*, etc. are all words that can only be translated by moving the soil in which they are meaningful and grafting them into other words sufficiently alive in order to sustain the mutation if the grafting succeeds.

The life of words is an index of the life of a culture. If *charis* means 'grace' and 'grace' means only the 'sanctifying grace' of a certain Christian theology which sees it as the friendship of the Father of Jesus Christ letting his nature be gratuitously participated in by baptised souls, there is obviously no grace – and thus no salvation – outside the orthodox Christian fold. But what about *kṛpā*, *anugraha*, *śaktipāta*, and also *prasāda*, *āśīrvāda*, *ānanda* and the like? What about *Saivasiddhānta* and many other *bhakti* theologies? What are they speaking about when they refer to the outpouring love of the Lord that purifies and transforms the beloved?

If *dharma* means only *varṇāśrama-dharma* as understood in a rigid way within the four castes and the four stages of life, in spite of the lofty conception of such a *dharma* (like that of the

Christian *charis*), there is no *dharma* outside the orthodox Hindu fold and any use of this word outside that context will be considered spurious. But what about Buddhist *dharma*, *ius*, *ordo*, *dykayosynē*? What about duty, love and all those links that hold the universe together? When a word is a living word, no one can have a monopoly of it and fix its meaning. The problem is, of course, not restricted to nouns. It also affects verbs, the auxiliary verbs especially, and the entire relationship between grammar and sense, ultimately between speaking and being.

The fundamental question here is not to defend a Christian or a Hindu standpoint, but to be able to use an intelligible and unbiased language.

Translation is only possible when words are sufficiently alive to be able to assimilate new meanings and acquire new connotations without losing their identity. Only terms are inflexible and univocal. If you add a single atom to a water molecule, you no longer have 'water' but the first step to an atomic bomb. The translation of terms, i. e., of labels which we ascribe to empirical data offers no major difficulty. The problem arises when we are translating real words which are expressions of human experiences. An experience cannot be totally severed from the living expression which is the fruit of the impression that has created it. How can we translate experiences? It can only be by a real transplant. Translating entails not only what the exclusive meaning is for the conveyer, but must also encompass the meaningfulness for the receiver. We can only re-enact the human act of understanding and invite the listener to share in the corporate experience conveyed by us in the host language.

This is the power of the word, *vāc*, *logos*: to be able to convey experiences. Words are symbols and thus include not only the meaning of the speaker, but also the understanding of the hearer. Terms, on the other hand, are epistemic signs, referring to objectifiable entities. Modern science is an exact discipline because it previously defines its terms: let this be called sulfuric acid, let this be considered a body, this a movement from one point to another. Theology cannot define its words. I cannot say this is God, this is grace, peace, goodness, man, without taking into consideration what another intends with the same words.

We may be unable even to choose other words to express possible dissent, we will have to use the same words with different meaning. It is, in true speaking, in the human interaction *par excellence*, that theology creates its own field. And it is in the very reception and listening to the word that man finds he is not alone, not even the inventor of his own words.

To succeed in such a theology does not mean melting into one single religion or agreement about all the issues. On the contrary, this theology will perhaps enable us to locate for the first time the real issues and to dispel misunderstandings. We will not solve all the problems, but the dialectical oppositions may become creative polarities.

* * * *

And now at the end of this Preface for a Hindu-Christian theology, if I were to suggest a constructive approach I would begin by elaborating its first sūtra:

The companion of Being is Speaking - not Thinking!

The Firstborn of *Ṛta* is *Vāc* - not *Manas*.

In the Beginning was the Logos, the Word - not Reason.

Kodaikanal
August 1978

R. Panikkar

Giving the Reason for Our Faith

At the beginning of the Church, when its members were the poorest of the poor, looked down upon by the wise and the powerful, St. Peter had to shore up their courage in faith and call upon them: "Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you will have." (*1 Pet.* 3: 15). The plight of Christians looked really hopeless at that time. But today the roles are reversed: Christians form the great majority in the affluent nations of the world and they are accused by the non-Christians of being racists, oppressors and economic exploiters of the poor. The Blacks and the poor even openly say that they have no reason to be Christians since it would be tantamount to identifying themselves with their real oppressors. Even in the developing countries like India Christians mostly belong to the better-off sections of society and are sometimes even identified as remnants of the bygone colonial era. In this situation the task of the Christian theologian is to render a reason for his faith: What is the relevance of Christianity, which still has a foreign outlook, attitude and style of life, to the Indian masses? How can the Christian theologian remain so calm in his traditional faith when the house is on fire? How can he waste his time discussing the Trinity, transubstantiation, the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth, resurrection and heaven after death, when the big majority of the people are faced with hunger, economic exploitation, social inequality and the nagging question whether their children will have any chance to live after their birth? Interreligious dialogue which has caught the fancy of Christian theologians, especially after Vatican II, appears today a meaningless luxury, since most of the traditional religions like Hinduism and Buddhism are stuck in their pasts and are irrelevant to the concerns of modern man, and if they do anything at all only add to his woes through their traditional antagonisms and political rivalries. In this context the efforts to create an Indian Christian theology must focus attention on giving the reason for the Christian faith in the Indian context today, its response to the anxieties, doubts and aspirations of

people at present, and to the contradictions and conflicts that afflict society.

The task of the Christian, who announces a supernatural Gospel proclaimed by the Son of God, is more difficult than that of the spokesmen for other world religions, which have maintained a more human and naturalistic profile drawing inspiration from human sages and religious leaders. Among the religions of the world two broad patterns may be discerned. Some have traditions extending far into the past to indefinable origins, and others centre on specific events as the focus of their message. Primitive religions in general have their beginnings in the religious awareness of early humanity. Hinduism claims to be the *sanātana dharma* with no historical founder to trace its beginnings to, though its development in history can to a certain extent be ascertained. So are the origins of the Chinese and Japanese religions. But Buddhism dates from the event of Buddha's illumination under the Bodhi tree when the four Noble Truths and the eightfold Path dawned upon his consciousness, though according to Buddhism these are basic realities of human existence which everyone has to realize by himself. Islam as a religious tradition started with Mohammed's *Hijra* from Mecca, when the people of Medina accepted his mediation, teachings and revelations. But Mohammed claimed to be only a prophet of God proclaiming the divine laws that are binding on all men. The unique event of Christianity from which it started was the appearance of Christ, the Son of God in the flesh: "The kindness and love of God our saviour for mankind was revealed... by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and by renewing us with the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our saviour." (*Titus* 3: 4-7; cf. *Jn* 3: 16). Yahweh, wholly the Other, who from time to time intervened in human history and spoke through the prophets has finally spoken through His Son (*Heb.* 1: 3). This intervention through Jesus Christ was not merely the imparting of a doctrine, but the reversing of a whole course of human history through the death and resurrection of Christ, which established a new order of things for all men. This is the essence of the Christian Gospel.

The scope of Christian theology is to make this new order of things centred in Jesus Christ intelligible and rationally

acceptable. St. Anselm defined theology as Faith seeking understanding and following Augustine's *credo ut intelligam*, I believe in order that I may understand. But this does not mean that faith itself is an irrational activity. In fact, faith is an intellectual response to the self-disclosure of God, and theology continues that intellectual activity by exploring its intelligibility and meaning in the context of the total human experience and of the total world vision.

Theological pluralism

This exploration of the intelligibility of faith was started in the early Church by the Apostles, Evangelists and preachers, who communicated their faith experience of the Christ event making it coherent with the religious context of their hearers and intelligible in the holistic framework of their world vision. Mathew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul had their own individual theologies according to which they organized and interpreted the details of their faith in the Revelation made by Christ. When Christianity spread into the Greek world and enlisted the ministries of persons trained in philosophical thought, theology assumed its scientific character. As everyone knows even the word theology originally meant myths concerning gods as well as metaphysical investigation of being. But it was also science in the classical Aristotelian sense with emphasis on absolute certitude based on eternal truths, defined in terms of its formal object. It was more or less an individualist pursuit remaining in cold isolation as a queen above all other sciences, considering even philosophy a mere handmaid. But today the concept of science itself has radically changed. It is more concerned with scientific opinions and probabilities than eternal truths, and is more operational, interested as it is in change, development and process, than merely theoretical. Hence it has in view the whole field of human experience and strives for interdisciplinary co-operation and communitarian venture. This new view of science has influenced theologians today and a plurality of theological perspectives is the result.

Even in ancient times there was a certain pluralism in theology. The Judaic Christians tried to make their new faith conform to Israel's past, while the Hellenic Christians were for

accommodating it to the thought structures of their own Greek wisemen. People like Peter and James struggled to preserve the teaching of Christ intact, while St. Paul constantly criticized the remnants of the Judaic customs and practices brought into the Church by the Jewish converts. Even today this diversity in reference to traditional Christian teachings continues. In this ongoing dialogue between Christian texts and the contemporary mentality, some are strictly orthodox, ignoring completely the ethico-religious and cultural values of the scientific community; others are radicals that would rather jettison the whole Christian past in favour of the contemporary mood, while a great many others would in different ways and degrees seek an accommodation between the two poles of Christian experience.

There is theological pluralism today even with regard to what people want to do with theology. Some are confident system-builders like Bernard Lonergan and Rudolf Pannenberg who define their different methodologies, principles and framework, to construct logically consistent systems out of the data of faith. Others like Schillebeeckx and Hans Küng are searchers struggling to get out of the existing systems to meet the demands of the changing context. Those like Bultmann and Moltmann who lost their confidence in the consistency of history and the validity of logical systems in the wake of the World War tragedy, take refuge in a subjective encounter with existence or in a distant future and create forms of theology like the Existential Theology and the Theology of Hope. There are yet others who want to use theology as a suitable tool to meet a particular need like the Black Theology and the South American Liberation Theology. The reemergence into world recognition of the religions of the third World like Hinduism and Buddhism with the political liberation of their countries from colonialism has brought to the theological field new thought patterns and models of synthesis. Since God and His self-communication to men and their salvation cannot in reality be different for different people, interreligious dialogue has opened up a new theological perspective, one in which followers of different religions can reflect together on the basic religious mysteries and enrich each other with their different doctrinal emphases and conceptual patterns.

Danger of reductionism

In this plurality of theologies there exists a serious danger of reductionism. With the new concept of science the roles of theology and other sciences can now become reversed. Dethroned from her ancient role of the queen of sciences Theology is often reduced to the position of a mere handmaid of other sciences providing a foundational context to the sociological, psychological and historical analyses of religion or to the comparative study of religions. Though theology, as the holistic interpretation of Divine Revelation and faith, must take into account the data and perspectives of these particular sciences, it cannot be reduced to a mere theology of sociology or psychology or history or comparative religion. It will not be fair to the uniqueness of the divine intervention in human history through Revelation, which is what Christianity is all about, to say that it is just a set of historical, or sociological or psychological phenomena among many. It will not be fair to the serious methodology and genuine perspective of these sciences either, since they leave intact the particularity of each event and phenomenon and do not deny the relevance and right of other sciences to deal with the same data. Similarly, interreligious reductionism is equally unfair to the particular religions. To say that Jesus Christ is only a Palestinian expression of the divine Logos as Krishna is for the Hindus not only denies the universal mediatorship of Christ through his humanity as the Second Adam and the new head of the whole human race, the central claim of the Christian Gospel, but also fails to realize that for the Hindus Krishna is not a mere local figure but an Avatar of God with a message and meaning for all men. To explain the Trinitarian dogma of Christianity as a socio-culturally conditioned way of looking at the Nirguna Brahman of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta denies not only the authenticity of the Christian message but also reduces Sankara to a mere socio-culturally conditioned interpreter of the Trinity!

The task of Indian theologians today

Christian theology in India cannot claim a glorious past. First of all there was an air tight separation between theoretical theology, which was mostly confined to priestly seminaries, and practical ministry guided almost exclusively by Roman Canon Law and Western missionary techniques with very little

authentic theological inspiration behind them. Secondly, the theological instruction imparted in seminaries was mostly based on textbooks written in Italy, France or Great Britain. It must be shown as a sign of our theological alertness that every new theological development in the West was readily adopted in the Indian Church and that Rahner, Küng, Congar and Schillebeeckx, Gutieres and Segundo and even Robinson, Harvey Cox and Bonhoeffer suddenly became celebrities in Indian seminaries following their best-seller popularity in the West. The over-dependence of the Indian Church on the Western moods and fads is evident in the fact that the recent Charismatic movement, which drew much inspiration from Oriental religions and their meditation techniques, was brought back to Indian Christian centres like Bombay, Bangalore and Kerala by the Western Masters, who came over with a show of authority, as if they carried the Holy Spirit in their travelling bags, and were welcomed with enthusiasm both by Bishops and clergy alike.

Thirdly, the Christian missionary approaches too suffered the ups and downs of the socio-political mood of the Western Church. Till the very eve of the First World War missionaries presented the Christian religious system as the only viable one as opposed to other religious systems like Hinduism and Islam, which they claimed were disintegrating by their own internal contradictions against the onslaught of modernity. But chastened by the tragedy of the first World War they shifted the emphasis to the unique Revelation in Jesus Christ, as the criterion and judgment of every religious system including Christianity. Still, the participants of the World Missionary Conference at Tambaram in 1938 on the eve of the second World War declared that the non-Christians had to die to their religious past to embrace the teaching of Christ. The shock of the second World War created a loss of faith in history and in organized society, and missionaries began to preach the Gospel as humanity's existential encounter with Christ. Today with the reemergence of an affluent West, there is a revival of the sense of history and the Christian message focuses on the eschatological convergence of all religions and movements in Christ. This accommodation to religious pluralism is evidently prompted by the emergence of various

cults and religious movements in the post-war West. The talk of an inter-religious theology conforms to this present day mood.

The cultural context for an Indian theology

Liberation from this overdependence on the Western Church is the primary requisite for developing any Indian theology. The theologian has to present his message in the genuine socio-cultural and religious context of India today. But this does not mean making compromises on the data of his own faith. He is not a salesman for the Gospel, and he need not be worried that if he does not adapt his ideas of the Trinity, Incarnation, Church, Grace and Sacraments to the Hindu sensibilities he will be guilty of cultural domination or colonialism. Christian Revelation was made in a particular human context and it is to be announced in different human contexts. Hence it needs a double interpretation, one in terms of the socio-cultural, historical and religious context of the people to whom it was originally made, and the other in sympathy with the concrete situation of the people to whom it is to be communicated. But explaining is not explaining away and interpretation is not compromise. Hence the theologian is called upon to maintain a double loyalty, one to the context and inner meaning of the apostolic and ecclesial experience of the Christ Event and the other to the concrete socio-cultural aesthetic continuum of the Indian community in which he reflects on the Christian faith. This latter context with regard to India is not necessarily constituted by the different religious ideas of the different religions and sects on such questions like God, incarnation, salvation and life after death. Only exceptionally competent scholars can even attempt such a synthesis of disparate conceptual systems and it cannot be assumed as the mental background of the generality of the Indian people. Theology should not be left as an intellectual pastime to scholars who, with academic neutrality, construct theoretical frameworks of "objective" truths. It must be the communitarian reflection on faith of all believers combining art and science, theory and praxis.

The psychological and sociological atmosphere for such common reflection on faith lies deeper than particular concepts

and systematic formulation. If India has a cultural unity that bridges regional diversity and Hindu-Buddhist-Muslim-Christian religious differences, that must lie in a certain mental attitude that stresses certain values and concerns shared by the generality of the people. Though this mental framework that unites all the people of the Indian sub-continent has never been and never can be fully explained and expressed, one can sense its presence and also know when it is clearly absent. It gained partial expression in such disparate traits like a deep sense of the transitory character of the world to the point of even denying its reality, leading to a great esteem for asceticism, simplicity of life, and abandonment of the world, deep personal devotion to the Godhead, respect for the human body, sex and fertility all as expressions of the innermost self of man, a certain natural mysticism that loves the Mother earth, the mountains and rivers and the cow, all as manifestations of a hidden divine maternal principle, even the strange belief in *Karmasamsāra*, and strict vegetarianism. In fact the individual expressions do not matter much, but the mentality and attitude behind them matter very much. In the beginning Buddhism and Jainism were the authentic spokesmen for that mentality and they were the true religions of India. As long as Hinduism remained with its Aryan rational mentality and Brahmanical sense of law and order it could not capture the soul of India. Only when men like Sankara and Vallabha became inspired by that authentic asceticism and devotional spirit, were they able to supplant the earlier religions with their own type of Hinduism. Islam gained a foothold among the Indian masses only when its Sufi saints shared the deep religious sentiments with the Hindu yogis and sages.

The sad fact about Christianity is that it never really got into the ancient spirit of India. Whatever might have been the life style and devotional attitude of the Syrian Christians of Kerala before the coming of the Portuguese, ever since the sixteenth century the whole Indian Church conformed very much to the discipline and outlook of the Western Church. The Bishops were good administrators and organizers, more Roman than the Romans in their emphasis on their legal rights and privileges. They never presented the image of truly spiritual men giving leadership by the magnetism of their inner experience.

The Church as a community is called together and kept together more by the external mechanisms of law and ritual than by the inner dynamism of shared experience. Any effort at creating an Indian theology must aim at a radical change of attitude and outlook in the whole Church. Hence the first task of an Indian theology is to regain the experiential and communitarian dimension of the dogmas of faith.

Theory and praxis

Theology in the West had an artificial development owing to the force of historical circumstances, moving away from experience and praxis to purely theoretical abstractions. Reacting against the Judaising tendencies of Jewish converts and the antagonisms of Jewish groups, the early Church, even with St. Paul, started a de Judaising movement, shifting the emphasis from the Eucharistic assembly, *koinonia* and prayer, to doctrine. In this Hellenising process that took centuries there arose the clashes between the literalism of the Antiochean school and the allegorizing Platonism of the Alexandrians, and in reaction to the whole controversy the Latin Church moved away from the concrete personal encounter with the three distinct Persons of the Trinity to the safer profession of the unity of the divine essence in which the three subsist, and from the confusing and complex experience of Christ's human flesh to the abstract conception of the one personality of the Divine Logos; when this trend was reversed in the Middle Ages by a return to the humanity of Christ it was in the atmosphere of Renaissance sentimentalism. The fellowship of Christians was almost forgotten, the experiential mystery of salvation became the effective signs of the Sacraments and the Church itself came to be conceived as a perfect society. As Jaroslav Pelikan rightly notes when the Church attempts "de-something" whether it be de Judaisation or de Hellenisation it loses something vital in its life. If this is to be avoided the method of theologizing by reaction should be abandoned. Indian theology should not be a merely de-Westernizing project. The effort must rather be both a going back and a going forward, returning to the original experiential context of the Christian dogmas and also moving forward to the praxis-challenge of creating a praying and sharing community in the present-day context. In this community of faith and life theoretical formulations and the

scientific tools for reaching them also have their instrumental value for providing the ideal of orthodoxy to guide and maintain orthopraxis.

The role of interreligious dialogue

In India Christians cannot live their faith in isolation from their compatriots, who follow other religions, but with whom they share the same culture. But, as noted above, theological dialogue with other religions does not mean merely using Hindu or Buddhist categories to explain Christian mysteries, or inviting others to share our experience while we rest secure in our positions, nor even eclectically and artificially picking and choosing what looks best in every tradition. It does not mean compromising and explaining away the Christian message to accommodate other people's beliefs either. Interreligious dialogue in theological reflection is a mutually enriching pedagogical process. Since theology is the interpretation of the ineffable reality of faith through human symbols, a personal encounter with true believers of another, religious tradition can reveal to one depths of meaning in one's own faith-symbols so far unsuspected, and help to remove preconceptions and errors uncritically accepted previously for truth. This process of mutual enrichment should go on until each religion realizes the other religions as its own dimensions.

Theology and human problems

But a more fruitful mode of interreligious theologizing will be for the different religions to face together the socio-economic, cultural and political problems of humanity today. Religions with their dogmas, traditions, rites and other institutional structures, tend to be ends in themselves and often forget that they are for the service of men, for the salvation of the whole man. Hence they have to incarnate their message in the concrete socio-political situation by creating correct attitudes and providing the right principles for facing poverty, sickness, suffering, exploitation and injustice. Otherwise they become irrelevant conceptual systems that leave people cold and unimpressed.

Conclusion

The task of an Indian theology is not to create a hybrid conceptual system fusing Hinduism and Christianity nor to explain away the elements in the Christian tradition that may cause inconvenience to the thinking habits of Indian religions. Its primary task is to get the Christian faith professed in fidelity to the context, meaning and implications of the Christian texts, and in true loyalty to the authentic spirit of India. In this, instead of engaging in a purely negative process of de-Westernization, the theologian must integrate his theoretical enterprise to the holistic context of communitarian reflection, liturgical celebration and actual faith and life. This holistic integration of faith to life can greatly profit from a personal encounter with men of other faiths not only in sharing religious experience but also especially in facing together the everyday problems of man: hunger and misery, social conflicts, isolation and meaninglessness, experienced by millions of people in India today.

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Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity-towards a Relevant Theology

I. The Asian context

Asia suffers under the heels of a forced poverty. Its life has been truncated by centuries of colonialism and a more recent neo-colonialism. Its cultures are marginalized, its social relations distorted. The cities with their miserable slums, swollen with the poor peasants driven off the land constitute a picture of wanton affluence side by side with abject poverty that is common to the majority of Asia's countries. This extreme disparity is the result of a class contradiction, a continuous domination of Asia by internal and external forces. The consequences of this type of capitalist domination is that all things, time and life itself, have become marketable commodities. A small minority of owners dictates the quality of life for the producers (workers, peasants and others) in determining the price of their energy, skills, intelligence as well as the material benefits needed to sustain these. What is produced, how and where it is produced, for whom it is produced are the decisions of transnational corporations in collusion with the national elites and with the overt or covert support of political and military forces.

The struggle against these forces has been courageously taken up by the advocates of socialism. This socio-political order corresponds to the aspirations of the Asian masses both in the rural and urban areas since it promises to them the right to take their life into their own hands, to determine both the social and economic conditions that govern their well-being. A very large part of Asia has succeeded, after long struggles, in establishing this socialist order. However, it must be added that the socialist transformation in these countries is not yet complete and that these countries must continue to liberate themselves from all distortions in an on-going self-criticism.

Neither will socialist movements in Asia be thorough in their struggle for full humanity without an inner liberation from self-seeking and exploitative instincts. The rich traditions of the major religions of Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity) offer many inspirations. The richness is not only expressed in philosophical formulations but also in various art forms such as dance and drama, poems and songs as well as in myths and rites, parables and legends. It is only when we immerse ourselves in the "peoples' cultures" that our struggle acquires an indigenous dimension.

However it is equally true that the social function of religions or cultural systems is ambiguous. In the past religions and cultural systems have played the role of legitimizing feudal relationships, yet the self-critical principle inherent in them can be a source of liberation today from the domination of capitalist values and ideologies.

Hence we feel that the Asian context which dictates the terms of an Asian theology consists of a struggle for fuller humanity in the socio-political as well as the psycho-spiritual aspects. The liberation of all human beings is both societal and personal.

II. The issues

We realize that if large numbers of men and women find themselves socially deprived and progressively thrown further and further away from the centre of life and meaning, it is not a mere accident or the effect of a national catastrophe. In fact, from Pakistan to Korea, passing through the sub-continent and South East Asia practically all parliamentary governments, with the exception of Japan, have at sometime given way to military governments or authoritarian regimes of one form or the other. In these countries not only are political rights suppressed, but also are the rights of workers to strike in the cities and the rights of peasants to organise themselves in the countryside. Many leaders and people holding political views contrary to the ruling group are condemned to spend several years in prison, often without due process of trial.

Behind the façade of law and order are Asia's cheap and docile labour and laws which leave the country open to unrestricted exploitation by foreign capital with the profit going to a small elite. A deeper logic is to be found in the dual economies of these countries. The industrial sector, monopolized by the national élite, has developed along the lines of an export economy that does not correspond to the needs of the local population. It also depends heavily on foreign capital and technology. And as a result of unequal trade relations and the weakness of these countries their indebtedness and dependence grew to an extent beyond their control. International banks and transnational corporations have become the new masters of Asia's politics and economics.

At the same time the rural sector in these countries has remained stagnant. The so-called agrarian reforms did not change the unequal social relations of production in the rural areas. The benefit of the 'Green Revolution' went only to the middle and big landowners who could afford its technology. A great number of peasants were driven off the land in the process and ended in the slums of the swollen cities of Asia. On the other hand, the rural surplus thus accumulated is often re-invested in crops for export or channelled into urban industries, preventing the growth of production for food. As a result, Asia which is potentially rich in agriculture is importing food from outside and the amount is increasing continually at an alarming rate. Hunger and poverty will be the fate of Asian masses for many years to come.

A hopeful sign is the growing awareness among the oppressed peoples which leads to the growth and increase of peoples' organisations in both the cities and the rural areas. The majority of Asian countries have witnessed peasant uprisings and urban disturbances. Put down by bloody oppression and intimidated by imprisonment and torture many of these movements have gone underground and turned to a protracted struggle as the only means of changing their societies. While not necessarily condoning the use of violence which is most often unavoidable, we question and object to the enforcement of 'law and order' which consolidates the control of the power élites while thwarting the organised conscientious objections of the deprived majorities.

rities. When legalised violence leaves no room for peoples to free themselves from their misery, are we surprised that they are so compelled to resort to violence? Have the Christian churches sufficiently understood the message of revolutionary violence in the Asian struggles for political independence, social emancipation and liberation from the built-in violence of the present economic and political structures?

The youth in Asia, who form a large segment of the Asian population, are continuously victimized. They constitute the growing number of unemployed and underemployed labour force. A lack of proper educational facilities and decreasing employment opportunities in the rural areas where the majority of youth come from, lead to the irreversible process of migration to urban centres; while in the urban areas, the youth are the targets of consumer culture and in turn become vehicles of de-culturation. We emphasise also that some students youth and workers have been playing the important role of a critical and committed force in the struggle for the basic rights of the oppressed people. At the same time, they are also made pawns in the power politics of politicians and other interest groups, thus losing their genuine relevance and are even sacrificed in abrupt physical violence.

The educational system, linked to the established centres of power is geared to perpetuate the domination of youth. It serves as mere channel for the transfer of technical skills and alienated knowledge without reference to humanistic values. The pyramidal elitist structure of education is used to fabricate losers, who are continuously exploited.

We recognise deeply that women were also victims of the same structures of domination and exploitation. In the context of the Asiatic religions and cultures, the relationship between men and women is still one of domination. This situation is worse in the poorer classes of society. Thus women face an unforgivable double oppression.

At the economic level, a male-dominated society reduces the 'price' of woman-labour and limits the scope of women's participation in the process of production at all levels...local, national, regional and consequently the intern-

lational level. At the political level, women are aware of the political situation in their countries, but here too, their competence and activity are greatly stifled.

Women are sexually and intellectually vulnerable in a society where an interaction of traditional and modern forces (especially tourism) compels them to compromise with consumeristic values of capitalist society. It also compels them to prostitution. Instead of condemning the system which forces women into prostitution, it is the women who are condemned by the men who exploit them.

We recognise the existence of ethnic minorities in every Asian country. They are among the most deprived sector at all levels including the economic, political and cultural. They are struggling for self-determination against heavy odds, yet their authentic struggle is often utilised by the centres of power in playing up racial antagonism to camouflage themselves and disrupt the unity among the marginalised.

Mass media, including the printed word, films, television etc. are controlled by the ruling élite to propagate their dominant value systems and myths, providing a dehumanizing, individualistic, consumerist culture. Despite this domination, we also witness the emergence of a more creative micro-media that portrays realistically the struggle of the dominated people.

We need to mention also the increasing impact of urbanisation and irrational industrialisation. Women, children and men together face narrowing opportunities for education, housing and health services as these social needs are determined by market forces. With the transfer of the platforms of production and mechanization from industrialised countries, environmental pollution surfaces in most of the Asian countries, causing ecological imbalances. Here we join with our fishermen in their struggle against the unscrupulous practices of certain countries like Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.

We realise also the legitimising role of religion in the course of history within the Asian context. Religions form an integral part of the total social reality inseparable from all spheres of action. Much interaction has taken place between religion and politics in Asia down the ages and today

there are significant movements of social renewal inspired by religions outside the traditional institutions. We need to stress the critical and transforming element in religion and culture. A serious socio-political analysis of realities and involvement in political and ideological struggles should be seen as vital elements of religion in its role as a critic. Here we realise the creative force of culture in bringing people together and giving them an identity within their struggles. Critical cultural action would destroy old myths and create new symbols in continuity with the cultural treasures of the past.

III. Towards a relevant theology

We are conscious of the fact that the vital issues of the realities of Asia indicate the ambivalent role of the major religions in Asia and pose serious questions to us, hence challenging the dehumanizing *status quo* of theology. To be relevant, theology must undergo a radical transformation.

A. Liberation : area of concern

In the context of the poverty of the teeming millions of Asia and their situation of domination and exploitation, our theology must have a very definite liberational thrust.

The first act of theology, its very heart, is commitment. This commitment is a response to the challenge of the poor in their struggle for full humanity. We affirm that the poor and the oppressed of Asia are called by God to be the architects and builders of their own destiny. Thus theology starts with the aspirations of the oppressed towards full humanity and counts on their growing consciousness of, and their ever-expanding efforts to overcome, all obstacles to the truth of their history.

B. Subject of theology

To be truly liberating, this theology must arise from the Asian poor with a liberated consciousness. It is articulated and expressed by the oppressed community using the technical skills of Biblical scholars, social scientists, psychologists, anthropologists and others. It can be expressed in many ways, in art forms, drama, literature, folk stories and native wisdom as well as in doctrinal-pastoral statements.

Most participants asserted that every theology is conditioned by the class position and class consciousness of the theologian. Hence a truly liberating theology must ultimately be the work of the Asian poor, who are struggling for full humanity. It is they who must reflect on and say what their faith-life experience in the struggle for liberation is. This does not exclude the so-called specialists in theology. With their knowledge they can complement the theologizing of the grass-roots people. But their theologizing becomes authentic only when rooted in the history and struggle of the poor and the oppressed.

C. Liberation, culture and religion

Theology to be authentically Asian must be immersed in our historico-cultural situation and grow out of it. Theology, which should emerge from the people's struggle for liberation, would spontaneously formulate itself in religio-cultural idioms of the people.

In many parts of Asia, we must integrate into our theology the insights and values of the major religions, but this integration must take place at the level of action and commitment to the people's struggle and not be merely intellectual or élitist. These traditions of Asia's great religions seem to understand liberation in two senses : liberation from selfishness within each person and in society; these religious traditions also contain a strong motivation for personal conversion of life. These religions, together with our indigenous cultures, can provide the Asian sense in our task of generating the new person and the new community. We view them as a potential source of permanent critique of any established order and a pointer towards the building of a truly human society. We are conscious, however, of the domesticating role religions have often played in the past, so we need to subject both our religion and culture to sustained self-criticism. In this context, we questioned the academic preoccupation to work towards the so-called 'indigenization' or 'inculturation' of theology divorced from participation in the liberational struggle in history. In our countries today, there can be no truly indigenized theology which is not liberational. Involvement in the history and struggle of the oppressed is the guarantee that our theology is both liberating and indigenous.

D. Social analysis

Theology working for the liberation of the poor must approach its task with the tools of social analysis of the realities of Asia. How can it participate in the liberation of the poor if it does not understand the socio political, economic and cultural structures that enslave the poor? The vision of full humanity and the complexity of the struggle leading to its achievement are continually challenged and distorted by the meshing of mixed motives and interests and by the interweaving of the apparent and the real. This analysis must extend to the whole length and breadth, height and depth of Asian reality, from the family to the village, the city, the nation, the continent and the globe. Economic and socio-political interdependence has shrunk the earth to a global village. The analysis must keep pace with the on-going historical process to ensure a continuing self-criticism and evaluation of religions, ideologies, institutions, groups and classes of people that by their very nature, run the hazard of a dehumanizing bureaucracy.

E. Biblical perspective

Because theology takes the total human situation seriously, it can be regarded as the articulated reflection, in faith, on the encounter of God by people in their historical situations. For us, Christians, the Bible becomes an important source in the doing of theology. The God encountered in the history of the people is none other than the God who revealed Himself in the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We believe that God and Christ continue to be present in the struggles of the people to achieve full humanity as we look forward in hope to the consummation of all things when God will be all in all.

When theology is liberated from its present race, class and sex prejudices, it can place itself at the service of the people and become a powerful motivating force for the mobilization of believers in Jesus to participate in Asia's on-going struggle for self identity and human dignity. For this, we need to develop whole new areas of theology such as understanding the revolutionary challenge of the life of Jesus, seeing in Mary the truly liberated woman who participated in the struggle of Jesus and her people, bridging the gaps of our denominational separation, and rewriting the history of the Asian churches from the perspective of the Asian poor.

IV. Spirituality and formation

The formation for Christian living and ministry has to be in and through participation in the struggle of the masses of our people. This requires the development of a corresponding 'spirituality, of opting out of the exploitative system in some way, of being marginalized in the process, of persevering in our commitment, of risk-bearing, of reaching deeper inner peace in the midst of active involvement with the struggling people (*Santi*).

Our fellow Christians who have become regular inmates of the Asian prisons bring us new elements of fidelity to our people inspired by Jesus. To them we too send a message of humble solidarity and prayerful hope. May the suffering of today's prisoners in the Asian jails give birth to a genuine renewal of ourselves and our communities of believers.

V. Future tasks

Coming to the end of this Conference, we feel the need to continue the search we have initiated here. To keep alive our efforts towards a theology that speaks to our Asian peoples, we see the following tasks before us.

1. We need to continue deepening our understanding of the Asian reality through *active involvement* in our people's struggle for full humanity. This means struggling side by side with our peasants, fishermen, workers, slum dwellers, marginalized and minority groups, oppressed youth and women so that together we can discover the Asian face of Christ.
2. Our theology must lead us to transform the society in which we live so that it may increasingly allow the Asian person to experience what it means to be fully alive. This task includes the transformation of our church structures and institutions as well as ourselves.
3. We shall continue to assist in the development of a relevant theology for Asia through constant interaction and mutual respect for the different roles we have in the struggle, as professional theologians, grass-roots workers and Church people.

4. We seek to build a strong network of alliance by linking groups who are struggling for full humanity nationally and internationally. The following concrete actions taken in the course of the Conference show the beginnings of this network.
 - a) a letter of solidarity with 76 boat people in Hong Kong who were arrested on their way to petition for better housing.
 - b) A public statement by the Sri Lankan delegation pledging to support the Tamil-speaking people in their struggle for their just rights.
 - c) a message to Bishop Tji of Korea, supporting the Korean struggle and regretting the absence of the entire Korean delegation at the Conference.
 - d) a letter to the Kawasaki Steel Corporation, Japan, protesting the export of pollution to other Asian countries.
 - e) A telegram to the Latin American Bishops as well as to Pope John Paul II, expressing deep concern for the CELAH conference in Pueblo, Mexico.
 - f) Solidarity with the Filipino participants in their protest against the pollution caused by the transfer of high pollutant industries and the erection of nuclear power plants.
5. We are concerned about formation programmes in our training institutions and the life style of our pastoral leaders. The experiences of the Conference make it clear that there must be new emphases in our theological and pastoral policy. We need to evaluate our parish and diocesan structures to assess where they alienate us from the poor masses of Asia and give us the image of might and power. We urge that necessary adjustments be made so that our religious personnel may be more deeply in touch with the problems of our people.
6. In order to facilitate the implementation of our tasks, we have formed the Ecumenical Theological Fellowship of Asia.

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